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REVEALED

SWAT 4

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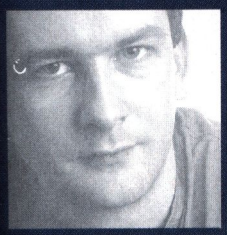
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CREATIVE

contents

Out with the old...



...And in with the new. That was the brief as we set about the biggest redesign in *ZONE*'s history in a gruelling four-week period that took the words 'sleep deprivation' and stretched them until the hallucinations started knock-knock-knocking at the door.

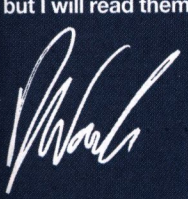
But some things never change. We might look different but we're going to be making the same noises. Honesty is the *ZONE* policy and we're sticking to it whatever the consequences – and sometimes they're pretty harsh. Recently we lost a big cover exclusive because, in the words of the publishers: "We can't be sure that you'll give the game 90 per cent." Fair enough. I couldn't argue with that – after all we hadn't even seen preview code at the time, let alone the finished reviewable product.

That's not the first time it has happened either. I got a call from one company who was extremely miffed that we'd given its game 86 per cent. "Why didn't you give it 90 per cent?" "Because it wasn't worth it." "But you put it in the cover." "And...?" Is 86 per cent a bad score? I don't think so. I never got 86 per cent in any of my exams (except the one I cheated in, and even then I got caught).

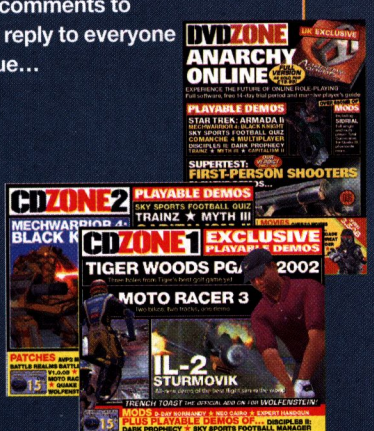
How about this one: "You only gave our game 75 per cent, that's a terrible score." "No, 13 per cent is a terrible score, and that's what your other game got this month." Click. Once (and I can't see this ever happening again) we were criticised for only giving a game 90 per cent. "You should have given it 96 per cent." And I'm not making that up.

I don't think we're overly precious about giving out 90 per cent scores – we just want to get it right. In fact, we've actually got the first Classic of the redesign in this very issue. We knew the game in question was going to be good, but when it arrived it took the office by storm. Head to the review section now for the lowdown, pausing a while to look at the first shots of the new *SWAT* game, and exclusive reviews of *Dungeon Siege* and *Star Trek: Bridge Commander*.

When you've had a chance to pore over the new issue, let me know what you think. Email your comments to editor@pczone.co.uk. I can't promise to reply to everyone but I will read them all. See you next issue...



Dave Woods
Editor





DUNGEON SIEGE
P58

THE WORLD'S FIRST REVIEW OF THE BEST-LOOKING HACK 'N SLASH GAME TO DATE...

COVER DISCS
P136

- **12 PLAYABLE DEMOS INCLUDING...**
  Tiger Woods PGA 2002,
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BULLETIN

10 **TOCA RACE DRIVER**
BABY YOU CAN DRIVE MY CAR

12 **GHOST MASTER**
SCARE THE BEJESUS OUT OF PEOPLE

20 **EMULATION ZONE**
THE SMALLEST GAMES IN THE WORLD

24 **CHARTS**

26 **HOTSHOTS**
PRISONER OF WAR

FEATURES

30 **SPECIAL REPORT**
PIRACY: WHO'S ROBBING WHO?

98 **SUPERTEST**
SHOOTERS. WE ARGUE THE TOSS

150 **GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD**
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD

HARDWARE

106 **NEWS**

108 **SPECIAL REPORT**
FIRST-LOOK AT THE GEFORCE 4

111 **REVIEWS**
FLAT-SCREEN HEAVEN

112 **ROUND-UP**
MOTHERBOARDS AND PROCESSORS

118 **DEAR WANDY**

120 **BUYER'S GUIDE**
THE BEST KIT, THE BEST PRICES

EXTENDED PLAY

126 **THE GUIDE**
BUILD AN OP FLASHPOINT CAMPAIGN

128 **MODSQUAD**
FIVE OF THE BEST MODS REVIEWED

130 **MAILBOX**

134 **WATCHDOG**
ROGUE TRADERS BEWARE

136 **DISC PAGES**

143 **FIGHT CLUB**
WE CHALLENGE YOU

REAR VIEW

144 **THE A-LIST**
THE BEST OF THE BEST PC GAMES

149 **RETRO ZONE**
IT WAS TEN YEARS AGO TODAY

154 **COMMENT**
ARE YOU ONLINE TOO MUCH?

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64



38

contents

REVIEWS

60 **DUNGEON SIEGE**
THE STUNNING ACTION RPG FROM THE CREATOR OF TOTAL ANNIHILATION

64 **STAR TREK: BRIDGE COMMANDER**
PILOT A GALACTIC STARSHIP IN ONE OF THE BEST STAR TREK GAMES EVER

68 **GLOBAL OPERATIONS**
ARE COUNTER-STRIKE'S DAYS OF DOMINANCE AT AN END?

70 **WORMS BLAST**
IT'S WORMS, BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT

72 **DISCIPLES II**
TURN-BASED STRATEGY-FEST

75 **VIRTUA TENNIS**
THE DREAMCAST SMASH ON PC

76 **STAR WARS: STARFIGHTER**
CAN YOU FEEL THE FORCE?

78 **EUROPA UNIVERSALIS II**
HARDCORE STRATEGY

80 **WARRIOR KINGS**
AGE OF KINGS MEETS ITS MATCH IN THIS INCREDIBLE HOME-BRED RTS

85 **DARKSPACE**
ONLINE SPACE COMBAT

86 **LASER SQUAD NEMESIS**
EMAIL STRATEGY BLASTER FROM THE MAKERS OF X-COM

88 **HITCHCOCK: FINAL CUT**

88 **TROPICO: PARADISE ISLAND**

89 **SOLARIS 1.0.4.**

89 **DIG DUG DEEPER**

90 **CAPITALISM II**

90 **DEMON WORLD II**

91 **TRAINZ**

91 **HALCYON SUN**

94 **RE-PLAY**
BUDGET GAMES AND RE-RELEASES

96 **UPDATES**
ANARCHY ONLINE 1.5, PLUS BATTLE REALMS AND WOLFENSTEIN MULTIPLAYER REVIEWS

PREVIEWS

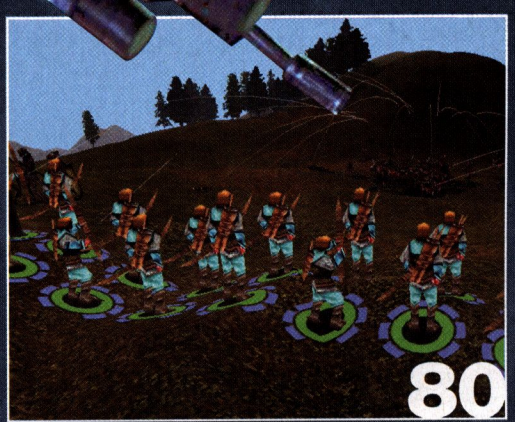
38 **SWAT: URBAN JUSTICE**

42 **IMPERIUM GALACTICA III: GENESIS**

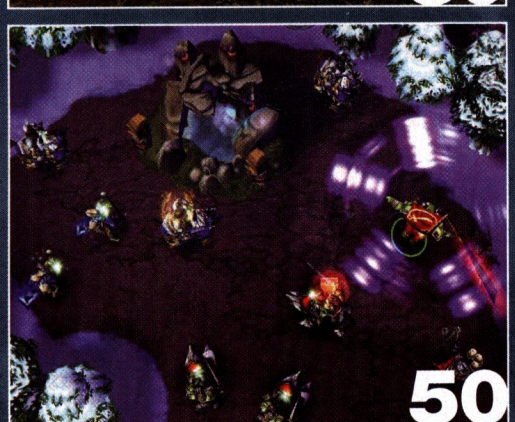
46 **TEAM FACTOR**

48 **PRAETORIANS**

50 **WARCRAFT III**



80



50

OVERSEAS LICENSING ENQUIRIES:

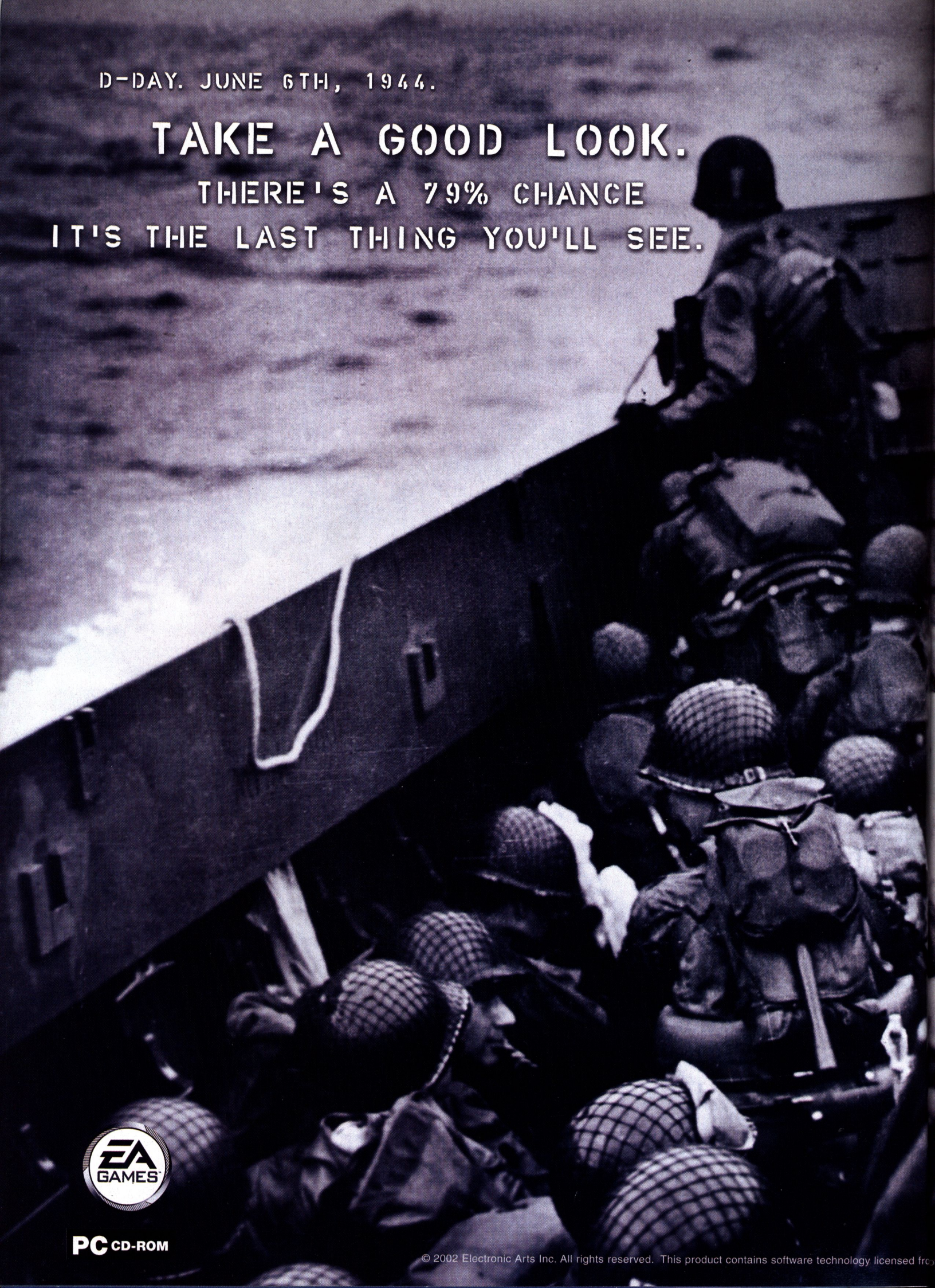
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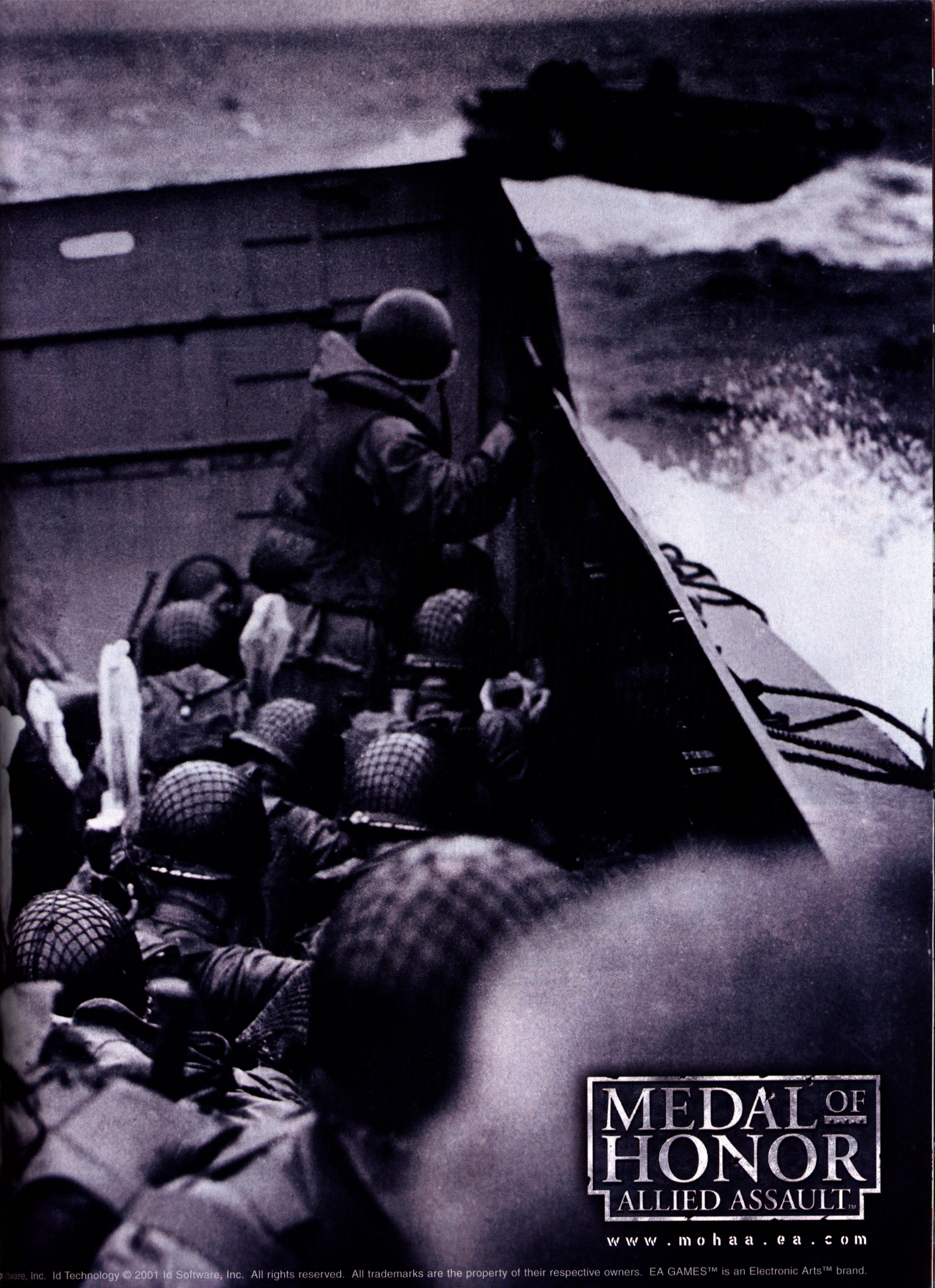
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TOP STORY

Get your motor running...

TOCA RACE DRIVER

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Codemasters
PUBLISHER Codemasters
ETA June 2002
WEBSITE www.codemasters.com

IN SUMMARY

Assuming the role of a rookie driver, you'll progress from unknown to World Champion in an elaborate narrative-laden career mode. Travel the world, drive expensive cars, and damage them beyond repair.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

The *TOCA* games have previously been well received, and this looks to expand the series with a character-driven approach. With a development team of 56, and costing £3 million to make, it features 38 internationally renowned real-life circuits, 42 authentic cars, as well as 13 separate championships. That's a lot of numbers.

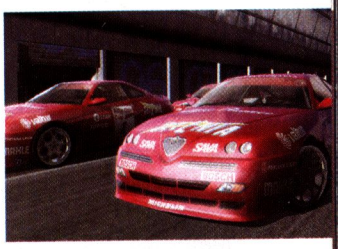
Gentlemen, start your engines

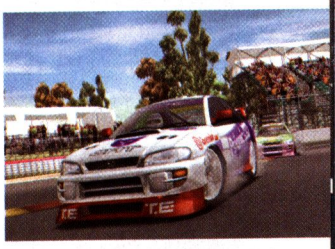
■ **DRIVEN** Steve Hill



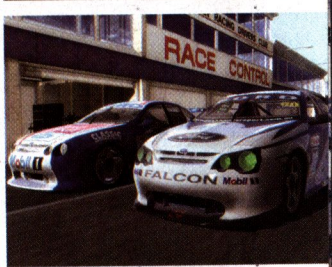


This is the first set of screenshots to show the actual in-game car models, and though not quite up to *Colin 3*'s borderline photo-realism, they're pretty damn nice.













THE PC PROBABLY needs another driving game like you need a kick in the throat. The barrage continues apace though, and this one has every chance of being quite good, coming as it does from the stable that yielded the first two *TOCA* games, as well as the brilliant *Colin McRae* series.

This is a lot more than simply *TOCA 3* though, as rather than just applying a bit of spit and polish to an established game, Codemasters has decided to take a deeper approach, giving it something of a role-playing feel. This doesn't mean that you'll be cruising round in an Audi TT sporting a wizard's hat and summoning earth elementals, simply that you'll take on the part of a clearly defined character.

Ryan McKane is the name, and driving cars is his game. It's an (oily) rags-to-riches story of the meteoric rise of a lowly test driver to genuine contender. Just how meteoric that rise will prove is down to you as you make a concerted attempt on some of the world's most challenging championships. Numbering 13 in total, these include the traditional British Touring Car Championship (the TOCA tour) as well as a slew of European and American equivalents. What this boils down to is a total of 38 real-life tracks, all recreated using official landscape data. Amongst those you might recognise are Britain's Brands Hatch, Silverstone and Donington.

Clearly, you're going to need some wheels to make a concerted challenge, and *TOCA Race Driver* doesn't disappoint, reading like the contents of a game developer's car park. As well as the aforementioned Audi TT, the 42 high-performance motors on offer include the Alfa Romeo 147, Mercedes CLK, Ford Falcon and Lotus Sport Elise.

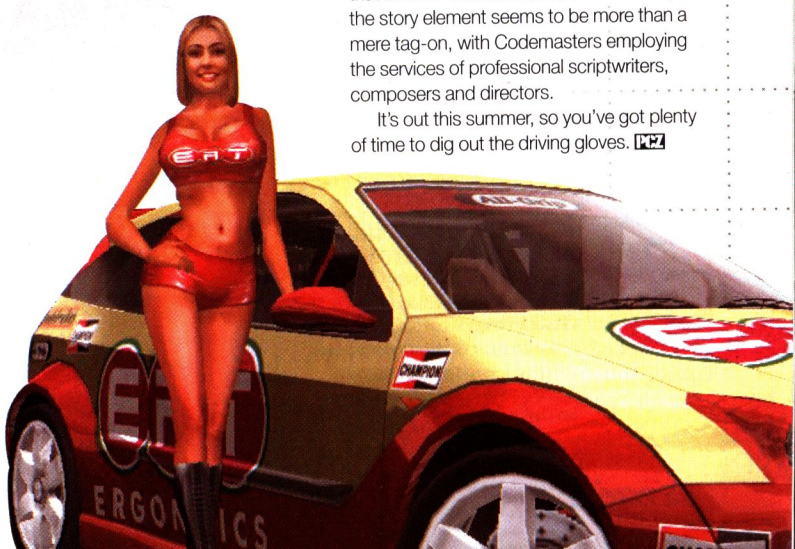
Needless to say, every car has been lovingly recreated, from the walnut dash to the leather trim. However, in a break from tradition, said vehicles can be scratched, dented, crushed, mutilated, and generally damaged in much the same way as their real-life counterparts. To the average prole this might seem perfectly normal, but traditionally car manufacturers have been extremely precious when it comes to seeing their prized vehicles bent out of shape.

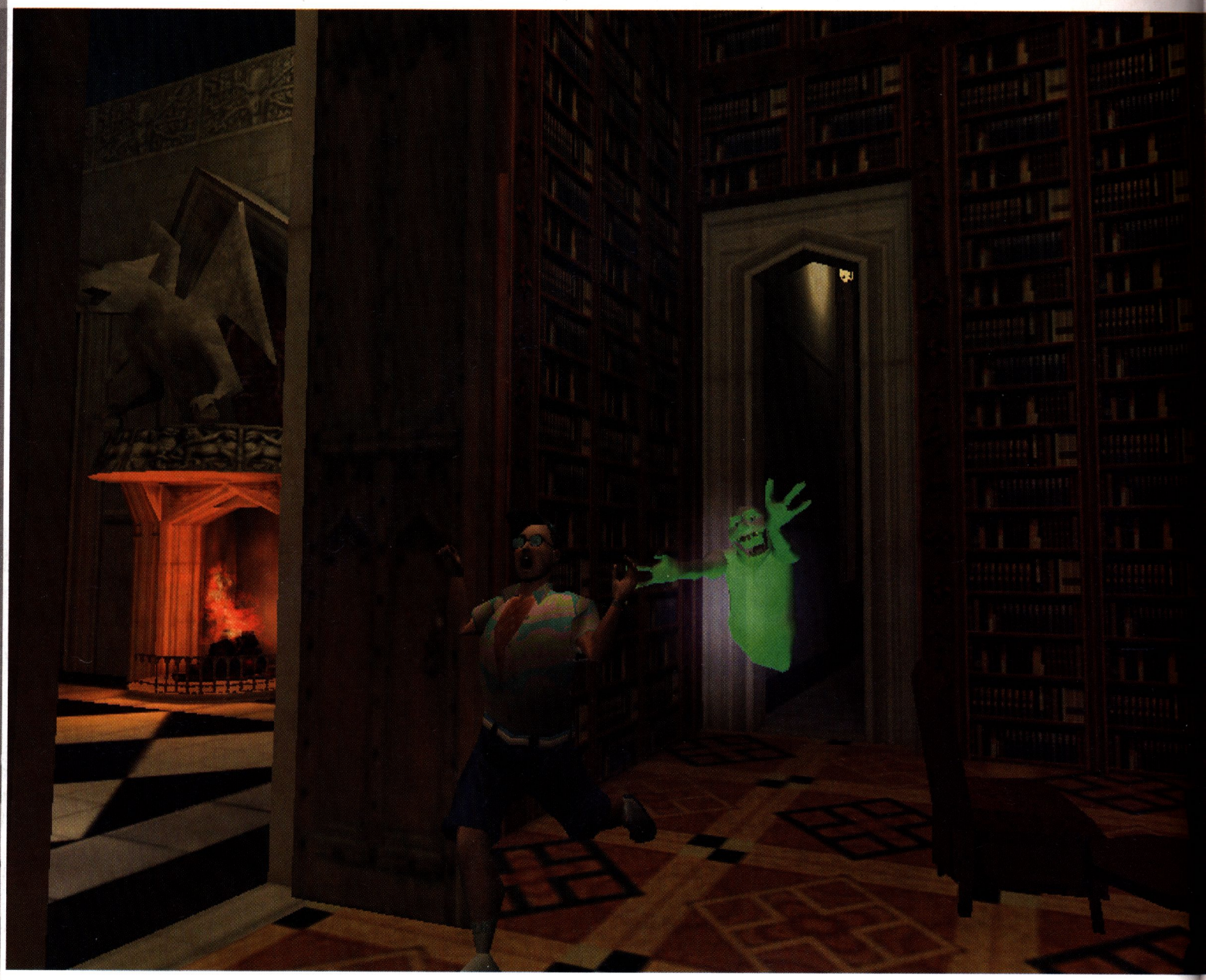
"Every car has been lovingly recreated, from the walnut dash to the leather trim"

TOCA Race Driver will not only show visible damage, but will render it using the so-called Finite Element Modelling system, as used by the crash test industry, which accurately simulates the deformation of both the exterior and interior of a car during an impact.

There's a lot to look forward to then, with the *TOCA* heritage virtually guaranteeing that it'll offer a decent drive. Furthermore, the story element seems to be more than a mere tag-on, with Codemasters employing the services of professional scriptwriters, composers and directors.

It's out this summer, so you've got plenty of time to dig out the driving gloves. PP





TOP STORY

Somethin' strange in your neighbourhood...

GHOST MASTER

It's time to put the frighteners on

■ **BOO!** Anthony Holden

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Sick Puppies
PUBLISHER Empire Interactive
ETA Halloween
WEBSITE www.empireinteractive.com

IN SUMMARY

Think *Ghostbusters*, but you are the ghosts. Or at least, you're a civil servant of the spirit world – a Ghost Master if you will – given a team of ghosts and tasked with scaring the bejesus out of a sleepy township. The more fear you produce, the more plasm you collect to fuel your ghosts and unlock new spirit powers.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

It's one of the most original concepts we've seen for a while, with a mixture of god game, sim, adventure and RTS. The idea of scaring the hell out of people has innate appeal, doubly so when you see the special effects extravaganza that accompanies it, and we're told the AI isn't half bad either.





The top-down cut-away view is used to plan your hauntings, but you'll be able to zoom in to see results of your handiwork.







YOU'RE AT HOME.

You walk into a room and your girlfriend/boyfriend/shagpiece is sitting with their back to you, completely oblivious to your approach. What's your first impulse? To creep over and scare the crap out of them of course, dropping a stealthy hand onto their foolishly unguarded shoulder with a boo! – then laughing uproariously as they convulse on the carpet in paroxysms of froth-mouthed terror.

So inborn is this sadistic penchant for frightening that it seems almost absurd that we've waited until now for *Ghost Master*, a game in which your primary aim is to strike terror into the hearts of the unwary.

Bravely straddling a number of genres including god game, adventure and sim/strategy, *Ghost Master* puts you in the role of an afterlife civil servant, sent to the small town of Gravenville to remedy an astral crisis of sorts. With a team of chain-rattling, blood-dripping ghosts at your command, it's up to you to terrify and manipulate a variety of panicky mortals through a series of objective-driven scenarios. It's all about managing your ghosts and their 200-odd frightening powers, unlocking new abilities and ghosts, solving puzzles and laying tortured souls to rest. A simple form of resource management exists in the collection of plasm, earned by successfully scaring people, which fuels your ghosts and their dramatic spectral powers.

While you may not have heard of developer Sick Puppies, chances are you've sampled the diverse handiwork of its founder, Aussie coding legend Gregg Barnett. Most recently responsible for the occasionally excellent *Discworld* point and clickers, Gregg's humble career also boasts titles such as *Way Of The Exploding Fist* and a string of classics featuring his iconic brainchild Hungry Horace.

Though clearly inspired by films such as *Ghostbusters* and *Beetlejuice*, we pumped Gregg about other influences on his latest project: "The initial influences were probably *Little Computer People* (a precursor to *The Sims*) and reality television. Then again, practically every scenario parodies or pays homage in some way to horror and popular movies. The names of the 30 scenarios say it all really: The Blair Wisp, Weird Séance, Deadfellas..."

"Your primary aim is to strike terror into the hearts of the unwary"

In a far more interesting referential twist, the game will feature camera ghosts that you can use to view and record the action in the game, though the manner in which they do so will switch between cinematic styles such as early Hitchcock, B-movie splatter and *Blair Witch* handheld.

If that doesn't grab you, *Ghost Master* also features an exceptionally powerful AI engine. "Everything, including the story, is AI-driven," insists Gregg. "There are goals in each scenario, but how, when or indeed how many they meet is up to the player.

"However," he goes on, "the feature that will knock people's socks off the most will be the special effects. Every conceivable power you may have seen in a movie or read about will be represented; from bleeding walls and indoor thunderstorms to time portals and headless horsemen."

But for all the visual flash and fresh ideas, *Ghost Master* is above all about good old-fashioned fun. Check out the movie on your CD and you'll see what all the fuss is about. PCZ

TIME CRISIS



■ **NEWS EDITOR** Anthony Holden

▲ Crunch time. The words strike fear into the hearts of game developers the world over. It's the inevitable last-minute rush that hangs over the entire creative process, when the regret of too many office frag sessions comes flooding home. The team starts to eat and sleep in the unkempt office, days and nights blur into one long stream of bug-finding, tweaking, worrying that an embarrassing placeholder has slipped through the net. It's a desperate process, and often the reason games arrive on our desks in a less than complete state, to be dismissed as 'bugged to f***' by an unsympathetic editorial team.

If you haven't already noticed, *PC Zone* has just undergone a major re-design. And while we're overjoyed with the results, it's given us a painful insight into the most fearful part of the game development process. The upshot is that, in our bleary-eyed state, we've left a couple of bugs in the gold version of the mag, and one of them is this very news column. Maybe in a few years we'll release an enhanced version of the issue with a new, more insightful column, just as Lonely Cat is about to do with *Hidden & Dangerous* (see p18), but until then we offer the following workarounds: skip straight to the page opposite for exclusive speculation on the future of the *Flashpoint* franchise; be amazed by the smallest videogames in the world on page 21; or gaze with a mixture of longing and trepidation at the new *Duke Nukem* game on page 23.

Just remember, years of playing games has taught us to react to new stimuli with a speed and skill unlike any other generation, so it would be truly perverse to start resisting change now. Enjoy the new mag. ▼

Ice twice baby

The Infinity engine is dragged out of retirement for *Icewind Dale II*



Dragons will, as usual, be bastards to take down.



Expect the obligatory sprinkling of new items and spells.

FOR THOSE WHO waited hungrily for *Baldur's Gate II,* the arrival of *Icewind Dale* felt like a cheap fill in, designed to abate our appetites until the main course came along. However, the chilly RPG fared rather well regardless of its ill-timed release, and many will be excited to hear that *Icewind Dale II* is in production at Black Isle Studios.

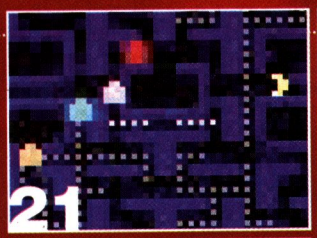
In fact, the sequel is already six months into development, and is scheduled for an ambitious May release. The storyline ties in directly with the main story in *Icewind Dale* and although it's set some 30 years later, several of the characters from the original will return. So, you can expect more of the same dungeon-crawling formula that has made the Black Isle games so popular, using the base AD&D rule system with certain aspects such as kits and subclasses borrowed from 2nd and 3rd edition rules.

Instead of the traditional rolling for stats method of character generation, *Icewind Dale II* will implement a new and hopefully more balanced system, allowing you to spread a number of points across your character's attributes. However, regardless of any new spin *Icewind Dale II* can put on the tried and tested formula, the game faces a dubious future, as come April, *Dungeon Siege* and the ever-present promise of *Neverwinter Nights* may have severed us completely from our isometric roots.

"You can expect more of the same dungeon-crawling formula that has made the Black Isle games so popular"

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21
EMULATION ZONE
The smallest games in the world


22
THE MAN WHO KNOWS
Recycling the industry's trash


24
PCZONE CHARTS
Latest charts and release dates


26
HOTSHOTS
Fill your trousers with dirt...

Flashpoint sequel?

Independence Lost is the mysterious new title from *Op Flashpoint* developer Bohemia Interactive

THE SEQUEL TO Bohemia Interactive's benchmark military sim/FPS *Operation Flashpoint* has been revealed. Or has it? Nobody outside of Bohemia Interactive seems to know for certain, but what we do know is that they have a new title in development at their Australian studio called *Independence Lost*.

The speculation began with the appearance of a website (see below), branded with Bohemia logos and featuring the first details of a new game set around a conflict in East Timor. While all details and images have since been removed and a media blackout imposed, we can tell you that the title will see you taking on the role of US peacekeeping forces during the Indonesian occupation of East Timor.

While unwilling to comment on the game's status as a sequel, Marek Spanel of Bohemia Interactive also revealed to us that *Independence Lost* is "not the expansion pack to *Operation Flashpoint*. It has some close links to the previously announced VBS1 army simulation project, and it should be available to the public in 2002." VBS1 stands for Virtual Battlefield Systems, a project devised by the US Defence Dept to locate and develop military training tools. Bohemia is already working on a version of *Flashpoint* to be used as a training application for US Marines, and it seems that as part of the deal it is being given access to the latest military simulation technology for use in its games. Our source at Bohemia Australia confirmed this, stating that *Independence Lost* will utilise "military advances in combat simulation and mapping." All of which means we can expect an even more meticulous and convincing battlefield simulation than in the new game, whatever its relationship to *Flashpoint*.

Bohemia Interactive • ETA 2002 • www.independencelost.com



The images very strongly suggest a game based on the *Flashpoint* engine...



...but with a far greater emphasis on sea-based and airborne combat.

Big trouble in middle China

The newest addition to the *Caesar/Zeus* stable of strategy titles unveiled

WHILE LARGELY overshadowed by sexy shooters such as *SWAT 4* and *Condition Zero* at the recent Vivendi/Sierra games event in Paris, the title that had strategy buffs in a lather was strategy build 'em up *Emperor: Rise Of The Middle Kingdom*. It's the spiritual successor to the long-running city-building sequence kicked off by *Caesar* a decade ago and carried on by such titles as *Pharaoh* and *Zeus*. This time, however, developer Impressions Games, currently busy with *Lord Of The Realm III*, has handed over the reins of its strategy cycle to low-profile developer BreakAway games, whose *Tropico: Paradise Island* add-on is reviewed in this issue (page 88).

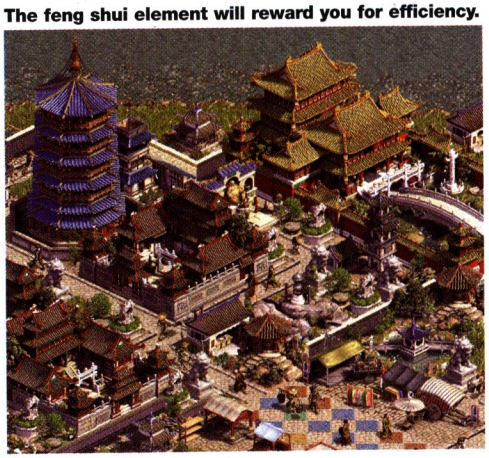
Emperor will continue in the vein of the previous games, with your aim to build and administer a sprawling city state, occasionally fighting the neighbours in a bit of real-time scuffling, engaging in diplomacy, and so on. But instead of huddling around the Mediterranean like the preceding games, *Emperor* is set in China, across 3,000 years of history starting in 2100 BC. "The city-building engine has been improved and updated since *Caesar III*," says product manager Adam Kahn, "but fans of the series will instantly recognise how *Emperor* works."

Elements of Chinese mythology will also make it into the game. "The Chinese zodiac will come into play, and the concept of feng shui will add an interesting twist to gameplay."

However, the big deal about *Emperor* is that it's the first city-building title to offer multiplayer and online support, including both collaborative and competitive options. While a co-operative mode is intriguing, the multiplayer option will be most welcome in a competitive setting. Imagine how much more satisfying the diplomacy, traditionally governed by simple rules and randomisations, will be against human opponents. It sounds almost like a revolution.

BreakAway Games • ETA Autumn • www.breakawaygames.com

The feng shui element will reward you for efficiency.



SHORTS



SHADOW OF DESTINY

Word has leaked from Konami that it's planning a PC version of last year's PS2 action/adventure title *Shadow Of Destiny*. Though it received a mixed critical reception, the game was applauded for a range of innovative features, including a twisting, time-travelling plot that begins with your own character's death. Assuming it receives a decent, fully optimised conversion it could be well worth a punt.



LE GAME DU COMIC

Ubi Soft has announced a new adventure title based on long-running French comic book *Largo Winch*. Apparently it's so big over there it's spawned a TV series, though it means very little to us. Ubi Soft cites the game's action and suspense-packed nature as being perfectly suited to the adventure game format, and we'll find out whether they're being straight with us come September, when the game is scheduled to hit.

POSTAL WARFARE

Running With Scissors, developer of 1997's controversial and blackly humorous *Postal*, has announced the long-rumoured first-person sequel to its infamous game, to be powered by the latest *Unreal* technology. *Postal 2* will once again cast you as the Postal Dude, a *Falling Down* type of character on a psychopathic killing spree. Expect a tabloid storm to erupt when the game arrives this Autumn.



THE DEAD ARISE

Novalogic's on-again, off-again horror FPS *Necrocide: The Dead Must Die* is apparently back on release schedules, now apparently due in September this year. Development on the gruesome title was suspended last year due to slow progress and the need to polish off *Comanche 4*. Novalogic has hinted at substantial gameplay and graphical changes.

Fire escape

Ukrainian favourite GSC Gameworld reveals *Firestarter*

FURTHER BUILDING ON its reputation as the hardest working codeshop in the Ukraine, GSC Gameworld (*Cossacks*, *Codename Outbreak*) has revealed new FPS *Firestarter*, only months after we broke the news of its eye-catching squad-based shooter *Oblivion Lost*. But where *Oblivion* is a squad-based affair with an emphasis on narrative, *Firestarter* appears to be from the *Doom* school of simple arcade carnage.

According to the tradition of shallow shooting games, the token plotline is pure sci-fi nonsense, positing a near-future virtual reality deathmatch game in which you've been trapped by a malicious virus. Fortunately, the only bearing this seems to have on gameplay is to put a time limit on your activities, as your life support system is set to fail 48 hours into the game, presumably not in real-time.

Interestingly for such a seemingly one-dimensional shooter, *Firestarter* is set to incorporate a thin RPG layer, with a variety of character classes (soldier, agent, criminal, etc), and three character parameters that can be powered up with experience. Artefacts such as time-jumping devices and autonomous guard-bots are also planned, as well as novel multiplayer modes, including play-as-monster and a team mode allowing control of a group of monsters.

GSC Gameworld • ETA Q1 2003 • www.gsc-game.com/df_gallery.asp

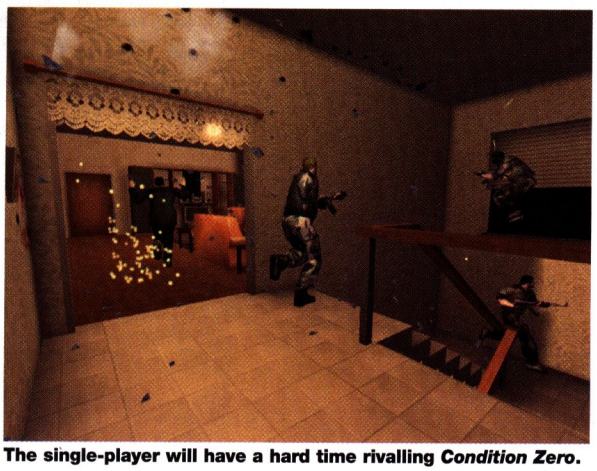


Did we mention it looks a bit good?



The RPG elements are reminiscent of *Daikatana*, scarily enough.





The single-player will have a hard time rivalling *Condition Zero*.

Ascension to retail

UT mod *Tactical Ops* is set for retail release

IN A MOVE destined to provoke calls of 'UT-Strike', 'Counter-Ops' and other smart-aleckry, Infogrames/Microprose has picked up the *Unreal Tournament*-based special forces mod *Tactical Ops* for a full standalone retail release. The move may seem like a cynical cash-in given the mod's neck-dislocatingly large nod to *Counter-Strike*, but to be fair *Tac Ops* has always been a top quality, enjoyable mod, with the considerable advantage over *CS* of having decent bots. In addition, the game, now to be called *Tactical Ops: Assault On Terror*, is being handed over to Paris-based Kamehan Studios for a full makeover, adding several new maps and skins and improving code and animations. All the most popular maps from the Beta version will be incorporated, as well as a "full single-player campaign", which probably just means playing each of the 20-odd maps against bots.

Other than this, you can expect the essence of the mod to remain intact, which loosely speaking means a more arcadey version of *CS*, with all the familiar real-world weapons, special forces vs terrorist dynamic and weapon shopping system. Of course, at last count there were around 35,000 less people playing *Tac Ops* than its counter-terrorist inspiration, making this one retail experiment with a serious battle on its hands.

Kamehan Studios • ETA May • www.tactical-ops.to



Gameplay promises to be simpler and more accessible than *Desperados*.

Merry men of courage

Commandos goes riding through the glen



DESPITE LOSING MORE and more appeal every time Hollywood trots it out for another kicking, the story of Robin Hood apparently has enough mythic appeal to retain plenty of currency as a game licence. There have been countless attempts to convert the classic tale into interactive entertainment over the years, and the latest effort has just been revealed at German developer Spellbound, creator of last year's *Desperados*, the wild west take on the *Commandos* blueprint.

Not to be confused with Cinemaware's forthcoming *Robin Hood: Defender Of The Crown*, Spellbound's game (simply known as *Robin Hood* at this stage) follows in the footsteps of *Desperados* with more top-down, squad-based strategy. A variety of missions based around familiar *Robin Hood* tales have been hinted at, as well as plenty of Sherwood Forest ambushes and even castle siege scenarios. Expect an early 2003 release.

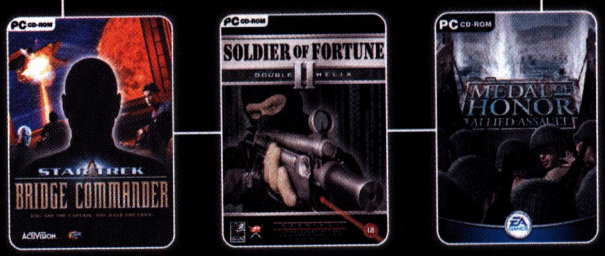
Spellbound Studios • ETA TBC • www.spellbound.de



It looks like Spellbound is still using the original *Commandos* engine.

SPEAK YOUR MIND

Add a new dimension to your gaming experience with Microsoft® SideWinder® Game Voice. Now you can bring the power of voice to your favourite PC titles including Star Trek Bridge Commander, Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix* and Medal of Honor: Allied Assault. Game Voice lets you link up with your on-line friends quickly and easily, taunt your opponents, discuss the latest gaming tactics and manage your teams more efficiently. Carry out gaming commands without taking your finger off the pulse – just say the word and the game will carry out your instructions. Isn't it time you made yourself heard?





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Microsoft

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*Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix – COMING SOON

SHORTS

MOLYNEUX'S MISSING LINK

Peter Molyneux has revealed his latest brainchild and, believe it or not, it's not a god-game, but a unique strategy affair set in the era of primitive man. Codenamed *BC*, the new game will send you back in time in an attempt to save mankind from extinction by teaching them the benefits of tribal organisation and stone-age technology. He has also confirmed plans for a *Black & White 3*, though he is to take only an overseeing role on all future *B&W* titles.

WE MEET AGAIN, DR JONES



LucasArts has announced that the next *Indiana Jones* game is to be developed by The Collective, who gave us *Star Trek: DS9: The Fallen*. Ambitiously scheduled for autumn this year, the game is likely to utilise the same engine as The Collective's forthcoming Xbox title *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, suggesting another third-person action-adventure outing for Indy.

BOND SHIFTS GEAR

Word has reached us that Gearbox Software, creators of *Half-Life: Blue Shift* and *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero* among other things, is hard at work on a new *James Bond* title for PC. It's unclear whether the game is to be based on the new Bond film yet, but it's definitely a new Bond storyline, and has been described as an intelligent shooter. Watch this space for more details very soon.

H&D DELUXE



Few games have begged for a director's cut more than the original *Hidden & Dangerous*, Illusion Softworks' action/strategy classic. And that's just what it's getting with the forthcoming *H&D Deluxe*. Due in March at a special budget price, the new version has been reworked by the ex-Illusion chaps at Lonely Cat Games, and boasts a revised graphics engine, new and improved gameplay, better stability and performance and the add-on pack *Fight For Freedom*. Peachy.

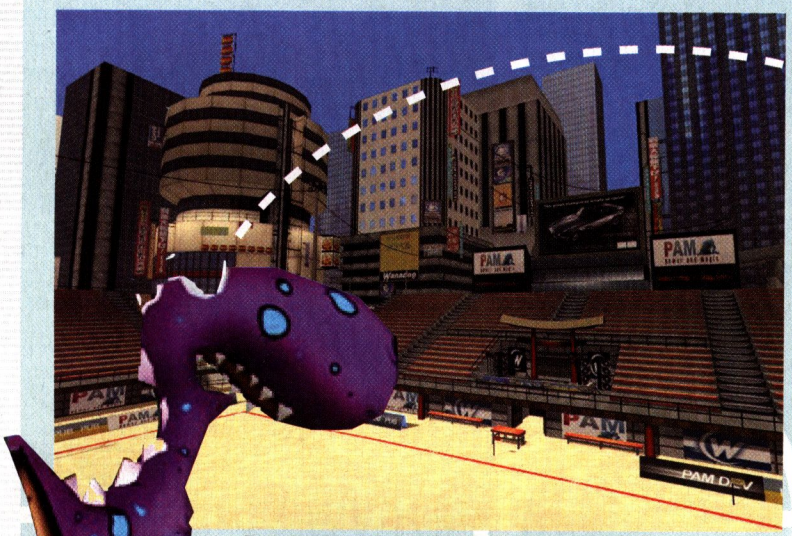
MATCH OF THE DAY

Pet Soccer

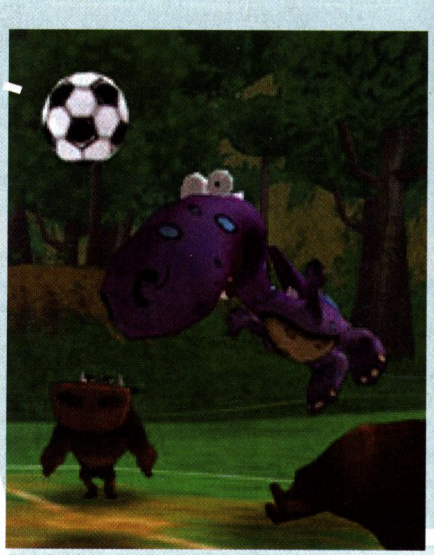
VERSUS

Pro Beach Soccer

Perfect conditions here at the *ZONE* office for the clash between *Pet Soccer* and *Pro Beach Soccer*. It's going to be a thriller, Ron



Beach football without the beer – can it work?



Reminiscent of Keith Houchen, 1987.

TWO NEW FOOTBALL games in one issue. Or pseudo-football games at least. What's to be done? Well, in the spirit of the World Cup and the new-look *PC ZONE* we thought we'd stage a friendly match between them and see what happened. It's a little something we like to call Match Of The Day, aka A Half Of Two Games. And just like a pre-World Cup friendly, the result means nothing in the long run, but it gets the punters in just the same. Maybe it'll become a regular feature. Who knows?

First off, we have the Polish contender in the form of *Pet Soccer* from Techland. Not, as Rhianna hoped, a game in which you kick fluffy terriers around your neighbour's backyard, *Pet Soccer* is in fact a game in which dogs, turtles and baby dragons turn the beautiful game into a cartoonish farce replete with every dirty trick known to man or, in this case, beast. Twelve pet types, 12 playing fields and 12 teams with distinct strengths, weaknesses and special abilities are offered, along with wacky commentary and some nicely warped cartoon graphics.

Lining up against the domesticated all-stars we have *Pro Beach Soccer*, a newly announced title from some French developer no-one's ever heard of. Based on the apparent global phenomenon of football played with bare feet in a sandpit, *Pro Beach Soccer* will reportedly offer 'all the sensations of playing beach soccer', presumably including excruciating sun-burn and a sand-chafed crotch. A variety of sand pitches will be recreated from exotic locations such as Rio, Dubai, Monaco and, er... London, as well as the requisite selection of international teams.

At this stage both games score goals for originality, colourful good looks and potential for unchecked arcade action. *Pet Soccer* is easy to discount for its cartoonish gloss and connection to karting game *Pet Racer*, but it's actually being built on the engine behind Techland's impressive-looking FPS *Chrome*, which should make it quite a stunner. The humour-value offered by the emphasis on unfair play also bodes well.

Pro Beach Soccer is more of an unknown quantity, though we've seen it in action and the spectacular athleticism that has become synonymous with the sport seems set to offer plenty in the way of thrills and spills.

We can only conclude that while both games will employ classic arcade tactics, *Pro Beach Soccer* is likely to win out with fans of sunshine and topless men, while *Pet Soccer* looks set to dominate in the fun and humour stakes. If push came to shove, we'd have to put our money on the animals.



Football played by a bunch of animals. Something Leeds fans should relate to.

PET SOCCER Techland • ETA Late 2002 • www.techland.com.pl/english

PRO BEACH SOCCER Power And Magic Development • ETA October



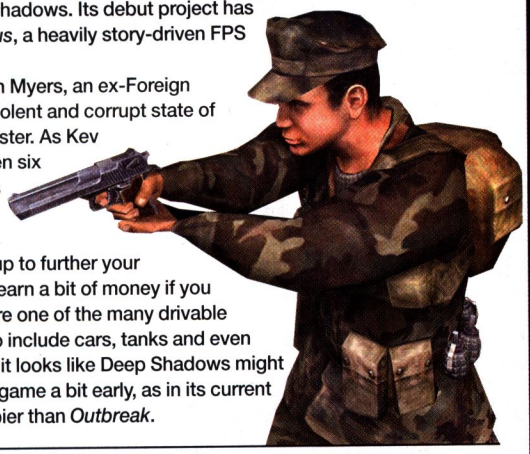
Let's just hope it has a good personality...

I'm your Xenus

New shooter/RPG hybrid revealed by the chaps who gave us *Codename Outbreak*

AND SO FROM *Firestarter* (p16) we come in roundabout fashion to *Xenus*. Keen Bulletin readers will recall that *Firestarter* developer GSC Gameworld recently underwent a bit of internal wrangling, with the *Codename Outbreak* team leaving to form new company Deep Shadows. Its debut project has now been revealed as *Xenus*, a heavily story-driven FPS with a strong RPG bias.

Xenus puts you as Kevin Myers, an ex-Foreign Legionnaire scouring the violent and corrupt state of Columbia for his missing sister. As Kev you must negotiate between six equally dangerous factions including the CIA and local drug cartels, helping or hindering one or other group to further your search. You'll also have to earn a bit of money if you want to buy weapons or hire one of the many drivable vehicles in the game, set to include cars, tanks and even helicopters. Unfortunately, it looks like Deep Shadows might have spilt the beans on its game a bit early, as in its current state it looks decidedly ropier than *Outbreak*.



Deep Shadows • ETA 2003 • www.deep-shadows.com

Legend is born

Sony unveils a new elite service for *EverQuest*

HARDCORE *EVERQUEST* players will now get the chance to indulge their goblin-fuelled fantasies on a new elite *EQ* server. Access comes as part of the new *EverQuest* 'Legends Service' which also grants you new quests, unique items, better in-game help and a personalised webpage on which you can recount acts of unbridled heroism to a captive online audience. Sounds like a good idea? Well don't rush to fill one of the 8,000 places on offer, because it's going to cost you a whopping US$39.95 a month for the privilege.

What will probably annoy the average part-time quester is that the Legends Service is boasting a "dedicated team of customer service and development staff" who will provide in-game support and generate new quests. Some would suggest that for US$9.99 a month it's reasonable to expect that kind of service from the standard subscription, particularly as poor in-game support has been one of the major gripes of *EverQuest* players in the past. We can only hope that as the online war heats up, major players such as Sony are forced to treat us all like legends.

Verant • Available now • legends.everquest.station.sony.com

GAIN THE upper HAND

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www.sidewindergaming.co.uk

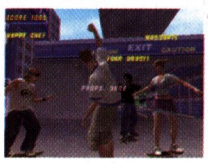
Microsoft

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*Dungeon Siege – AVAILABLE APRIL 19

SHORTS

SKATE-MANIA



The busy chaps at Gearbox Software are very near to completing the PC version of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*. A whole bunch of PC-specific stuff has been added to the game, including proper mouse and keyboard control, support for user-created mods and a number of online modes. They're also working on a *Tony Hawk's 4*, set to appear in 2003. Gnarly.

ARTEFACT RAIDER



German developer Ascaron has revealed its forthcoming isometric *Commandos*-style strategy game, *Artefact*. Based in an Indiana Jones-style world of pulp adventure and lost Aztec cities, the game is set to offer near identical gameplay to Pyro's squad-based classic, and is due out in the middle of the year.

ET TU, GLADIUS?



After nearly six months of development RedBedlam has released the first teaser image of its historical MMORPG, *Gladius Online*. Attempting to recreate life in the Roman Empire circa 180AD, the game's most innovative feature is an 'alternative revenue system' which will apparently result in the game being entirely free. The first public beta is expected later in the year.

WAR HEAD



CDV has revealed another addition to its swelling strategy ranks in the form of WWII RTS *War Commander*. Putting you in control of a US Ranger Battalion in occupied France, the game will offer two single-player campaigns of 20 missions each, including the Normandy beach landing and Operation Market Garden, and is due at the end of the year.

No place like home

Russians arrive late in space race with *Homeplanet*

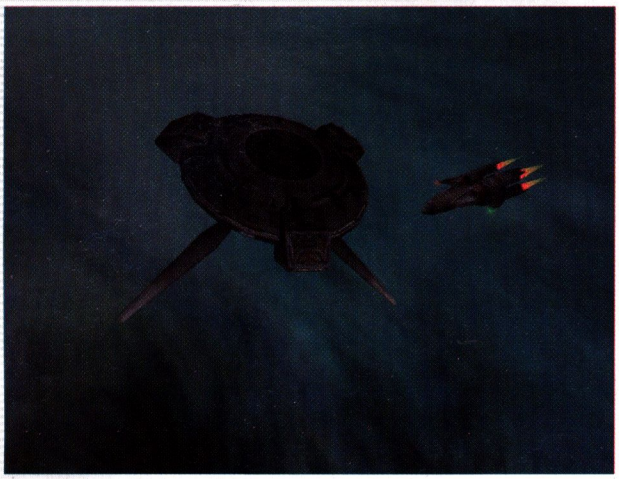
SET IN SPACE, with you as the head of an exiled clan looking for a new planet to call home, you could be forgiven for thinking *Homeplanet* is a shameless reworking of Relic's award-winning *Homeworld* – there's a pretty big clue in the title, after all. Title and setting aside, however, Revolt's spin on the classic *Battlestar Galactica* story will in fact focus more on 'phaser cannons at ten kilometres' direct combat than real-time strategy.

The Russian codeshop, citing such healthy influences as *X-Wing* and *FreeSpace*, promises a much more realistic game than either, with a Newtonian physics model and dark graphical style.

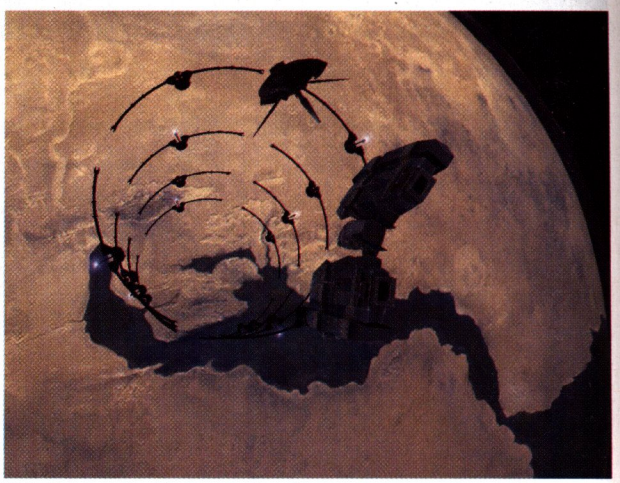
One thing that could set the game apart from *Homeworld*, at least in structure, is the non-linear nature of the missions, though how Revolt plans to implement such a broad strategy within the confines of a predefined story remains to be seen. You will of course be able to helm a number of spacecraft in the game, rising through the ranks as the campaign progresses, until eventually you can take indirect charge of AI-controlled wingmen.

Graphically the game looks rather enticing, with dark, brooding backdrops and grim-looking planets. The ships we've seen so far are perfectly acceptable, if somewhat uninspired, but as a whole we're quietly looking forward to the game, as you would a nice cup of tea in the morning rather than a big Friday night out with the chaps.

Revolt Games • ETA Summer • homeplanet.revoltgames.com

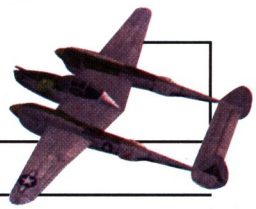


No sign of any Cylons at this stage...



This time *you're* the space invaders.

Jane takes flight



Looking Glass Studios' swan song takes to the sky at last

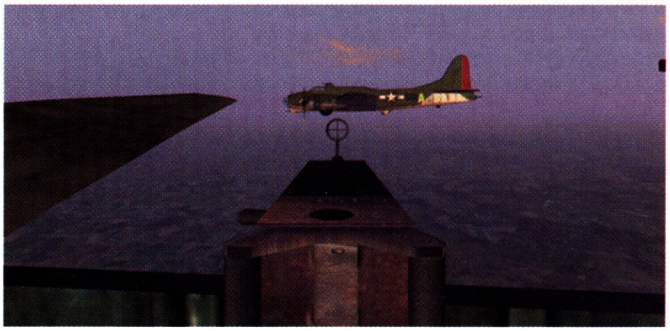
WHEN LOOKING GLASS Studios closed its doors a couple of years back, the biggest fear for fans was that the critically acclaimed and commercially flaccid *Thief* series would end before the third episode could peel itself from the drawing board. That, of course, hasn't happened, but Looking Glass had another fine-looking game in development, one whose potential demise few seemed to lament – *Jane's Attack Squadron*.

Happily, that game is now back in the air and nearing completion at Mad Doc software (responsible for the average *Star Trek: Armada II*). Mad Doc picked up the game soon after LGS packed it all in, along with much of the team behind it, and have been working in quiet solitude ever since.

That's enough of the history lesson, and you can expect a review next issue, but for now all you need know is that game centres on the air war over Europe during World War II. Fourteen aircraft will be available to fly through a series of low-level mission across two campaigns, all the while enjoying top-notch graphics and realistic damage modelling. Flight enthusiasts will also be looking forward to the multiplayer game, with players able to man various bomber positions while online fighter pilots give it some around them. Needless to say the game will have to be an ace in the sky if it's to have a hope of bringing down the mighty *IL-2 Sturmovik*.

Mad Doc • ETA April • www.xicat.com

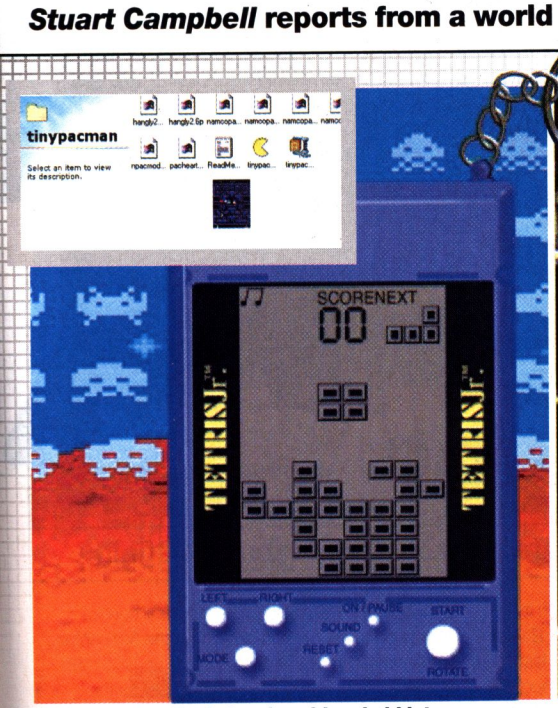




Jump into the turret of your buddy's plane and pick off a few bogies.

EMULATION ZONE

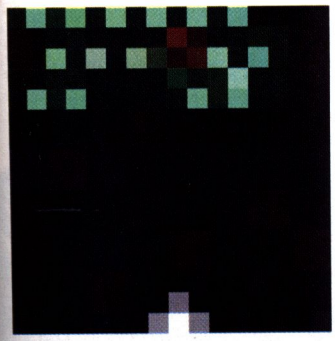
Stuart Campbell reports from a world where no platform is out of reach



At last, pocket *Tetris* for shovel-handed klutzes.



It may be tiny, but it's probably the best *Gradius* game ever.



Tiny games, so small you can fit them on your taskbar.



AS EMULATION GETS ever bigger and more ambitious (mighty arcade games like *Tekken* now even bowing to its might), sometimes we miss the little things. And just the cutest little thing Emulation Zone has seen this month is *Tiny Pacman*. A genuine emulation using the real ROMs, *TinyPac* runs in a microscopic window (see screenshot for a real pic of the game running in real time in the folder alongside its own icons), so you can tuck it away in a corner and no one will ever know you're playing a game instead of doing something useful (and since you can't make out your score, this really is a useless way to spend your time).

Of course, if you think that's small, you haven't seen anything yet. *Tiny Invaders* is so small it runs on the taskbar (if you wipe out the invaders the icon turns into a happy face, if they kill you it turns into a skull), but still manages to include proper invader movement and even a Mystery Ship. Roughly half the size of the fingernail on Emulation Zone's pinky, it has to be the smallest videogame ever. Unless you know different.

Sticking with the 'tiny' theme, just a quick update on Game Boy Advance emulation. The capable but cranky DreamGBA has recently been usurped by a new GBA emulator, Visual Boy Advance. Boasting even better compatibility (VBA plays newer games that DreamGBA can't handle, such as *Doom* and the lovely *Gradius Advance*) and a friendlier interface, this is the ideal way to check out all those GBA games that looked like they were probably really good, but you couldn't tell because you weren't standing on the actual surface of the Sun at the time you tried to play them.

And finally, the long-awaited debut of… the keyring emulator. Yep, your PC, powerful enough to run the budgets of most major countries,. can now busy itself with the task of emulating a tiny keyring videogame requiring less processing power than a digital watch. Emulation Zone actually owns a real Tetris Jr keyring, but has big grown-up fingers that always press at least three of the little buttons at once. Another triumph for the world of emulation then. Next month: we emulate things that are actually too small to see.

LINKS

www.tinywindowsgames.com/tiny – Tiny Windows Games
www.tetris.com – Tetris Jr
http://vboy.emuhq.com – Visual Boy Advance

VISUAL PINBALL TABLE OF THE MONTH

GENIE (GOTTLIEB)

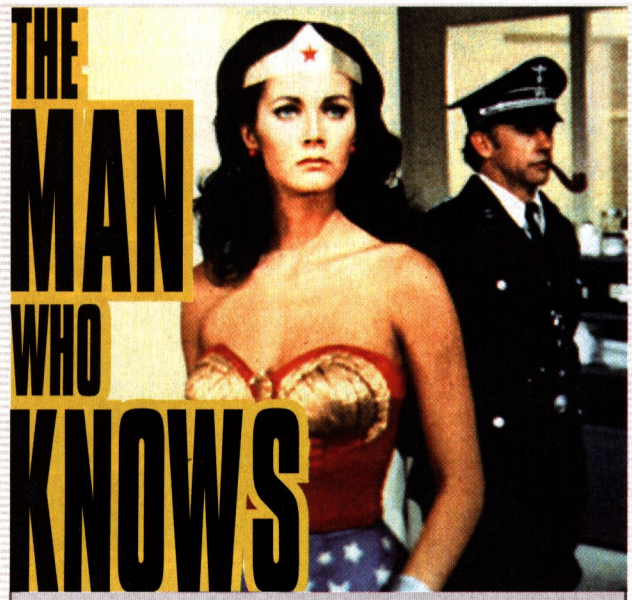
I still get the odd email from readers too ham-fisted to get Visual Pinball working properly with the Visual PinMAME plug-in, or unfortunates whose PCs aren't quite up to the spec (700MHz or so) required to decently run the two programs together for all the fancy bells and whistles of modern tables. So in keeping with this month's theme of littleness, here's something just for you guys. Gottlieb's 1979 electromechanical table *Genie* was a feature-packed 'widebody' table that didn't do particularly well at the time of its original release, being crowded out both by the exploding videogame scene and the advent of more advanced electronic pinballs. Divorced from the technological hype of its time, though, it's an excellent and extremely challenging pinball game, brought to life by one of the most exquisite VP conversions to date. And because it doesn't need ROM files to emulate it (not actually having any ROMs in the first place), *Genie* will run fast and smooth even on clunky 200MHz PC without any need for the services of Visual PinMAME. The old-fashioned artwork and sound effects make *Genie* appear quaint, but the gameplay truly is timeless.

LINKS

www.hippie.net/shivasite/irpinball – Visual Pinball table downloads



THE MAN WHO KNOWS



GOVERNMENT watchdogs have slammed a sick new virtual reality computer game that glorifies **Nazi** imagery. According to ***News Of The World***, "worried ministers want ***Day Of Defeat*** banned from **Britain**, fearing it will stir up racial hatred and provide a platform for fascists." The notoriously level-headed newspaper claimed that in the ***Half-Life*** mod, "players are 'armed' with authentic looking rifles, luger pistols and Hitler Youth knives. They fight on battlefields draped with swastikas and Nazi posters." The gutter dwelling publication pointed out that ***Return To Castle Wolfenstein*** "sold three times more than a pop chart No 1," and quoted **Labour MP Louise Ellman** as saying: "*Day Of Defeat* and games like it are a matter of grave concern, part of a trend helping to make Nazism acceptable." Bollocks obviously, and I politely suggest that the *News Of The World* sticks to what it does best, namely tits, bingo, and spying on minor celebrities.

"*News Of The World* should stick to what it does best: tits and bingo"

Doctors have warned that vibrating game control devices can seriously damage your health. In a letter to the **British Medical Journal**, **Gavin Cleary** of **Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital** has called for them to carry health warnings after a 15-year-old boy developed symptoms similar to hand-arm vibration syndrome, which is caused by using industrial tools for long periods of time. The boy suffered pain and swelling in his hands after using a vibrating control device for up to seven hours a day. That's his story and he's sticking to it.

The goblin community is up in arms following an attempt to prevent gamers from trading items acquired from their parallel lives in various massively multiplayer online RPGs. One group of such individuals, **Blacksnow Interactive**, has filed a lawsuit against **Mythic Entertainment**, creator of ***Dark Age Of Camelot***, after it demanded a stop to all sales of its **Dark Age** currency. Blacksnow's director of sales, **Lee Caldwell**, screamed: "It's unfair of Mythic to stop those who wish to sell their items, currency or even their own accounts, which were created with their own time." To give some idea of the scale of such trading, economist **Edward Castronova** has calculated that the economy surrounding the ***EverQuest*** community makes the virtual country of **Norrath** the 77th richest on Earth in terms of gross national product per capita, somewhere between **Russia** and **Bulgaria**.

And finally, ***Wonder Woman*** actress **Lynda Carter** has provided voiceovers for **Bethesda Softworks** RPG, ***Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind***. The object of many a teenager's warped fantasy, Carter squealed: "After working for so many years in the entertainment industry, I was delighted to do something new and become involved creatively with the development of this game. I really enjoyed the experience and believe *Morrowind* is something that the gaming public is going to be excited about." An expert later commented: "I still would."



It still looks an awful lot like *Age Of Empires*.



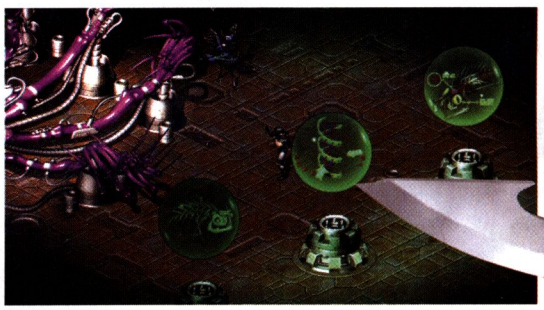
Way of the dragon

The Three Kingdoms are at each other's throats again

WHILE RISKING CONFUSION with its choice of nomenclature, *Dragon Throne: Battle For Red Cliffs* is apparently the sequel to last year's Chinese *Age Of Empires* clone, *Three Kingdoms: Fate Of The Dragon*. Interestingly enough, the game goes under the *Fate Of The Dragon* moniker in other territories, so we're not quite sure why they're trying to pull the silk over our eyes here in the UK, especially as we quite liked the first game. Most likely it's something to do with changing publishers, but if we were of a suspicious nature we'd have to suggest it's because the new title offers very little that we didn't see in the first game.

Again based around the historical conflict that led to the division of China in the 3rd century, *Dragon Throne* will offer the same unusual multi-map system of the first game, as well as the interesting profession-transference device whereby a soldier can wield a sword in battle and still till the fields during peacetime. A few new units and an expanded tech tree are promised, but otherwise there's little to suggest this is much more than an expansion pack masquerading as a new game.

Object Software • ETA TBC • www.strategyfirst.com



Warrior is about to die – needs food.



Futures past

Yesterday's future tomorrows revealed in *Harbinger*

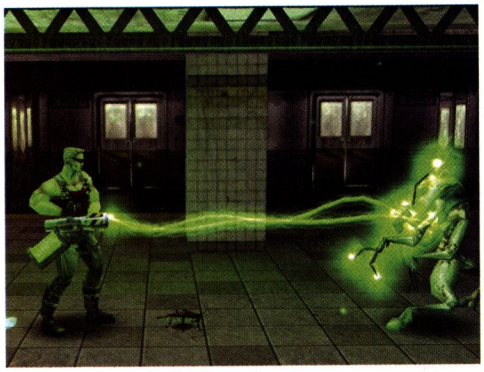
ACTION/RPG *HARBINGER* looks something like we might have imagined the future of gaming to look in our short-sighted youths. Graphics polished to a high gleam, classic 80s sci-fi aesthetics bursting with clean metallic lines and hydraulic piping, yet with gameplay as familiar as the tread on your favourite trainers. None of this fancy first-person business, we never imagined that'd happen in our lifetimes, just 3D isometric graphics and simple real-time combat, with a bit of questing and a linear plot development for good measure; *Diablo* with lasers and robots if you will.

Most of the team at Arizona-based Silverback Entertainment hail from *Postal* developer Running With Scissors, so we wouldn't be surprised to find something in the game that dabbles on the edges of acceptability. Otherwise *Harbinger* appears to be a straightforward RPG-tinged blast-'em-up, but one so sharp you could cut your finger on it. Oddly, the game is yet to secure a publisher, but we expect this will be remedied very soon.

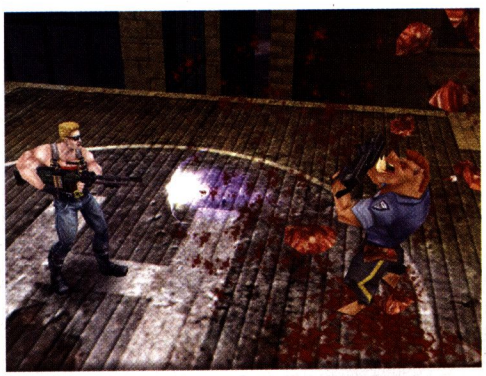
Silverback Entertainment • ETA Summer • www.silverbackgames.com

Put up your dukes

Shake it baby, for *Duke Nukem: Manhattan Project*

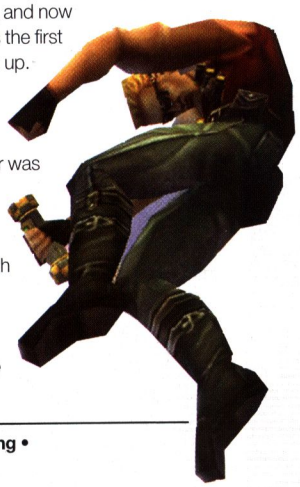


Bustin' makes me feel good...



Bag yourself some prime bacon.

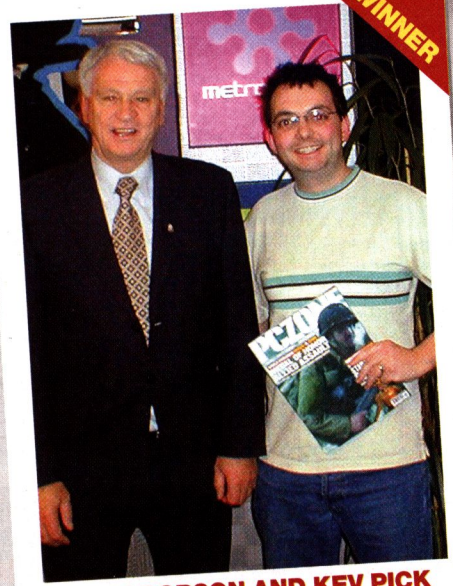
JUST LAST ISSUE we gave you an update on the world's second most eagerly awaited Duke Nukem game, *Duke Nukem: Manhattan Project*, and now Arush Entertainment has given us the first glimpse of their arcade shoot 'em up. What's more, it actually looks bloody good, not that we expected otherwise. The mostly side-scrolling 3D platform shooter was originally intended to be a downloadable episodic affair, but has now reverted to a more traditional boxed retail model. With Duke-strength attitude and a full complement of new weaponry, it could be a convenient way to while away the months until *Duke Nukem Forever* resurfaces.



Arush Entertainment • ETA Spring • www.arushgames.com

FOOTBALL CRAZY COMPETITION

"Send us a photograph with yourself and a famous footballer", we said in issue 112, and you did.



WINNER

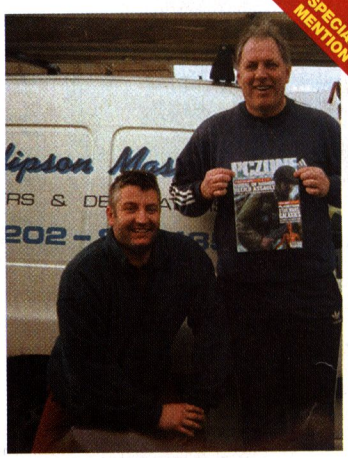
BOBBY ROBSON AND KEV PICK

A CLASSIC TRIUMVIRATE if ever we've seen one. Kev wins because Bobby Robson is **THE** man. Kev found out that he was on at the local radio station, nipped down the road and demanded an audience. Snapping Warren Barton (shipped to Derby almost immediately after his radio interview) was the icing on a pretty spectacular cake.



WINNER

DOLLY PARTON

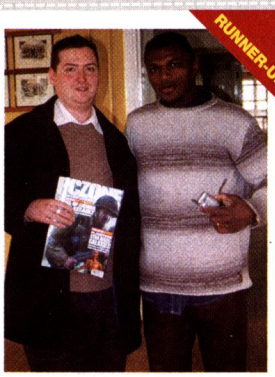


SPECIAL MENTION

FORBES PHILLIPSON MASTERS AND PHILIP DAVIS

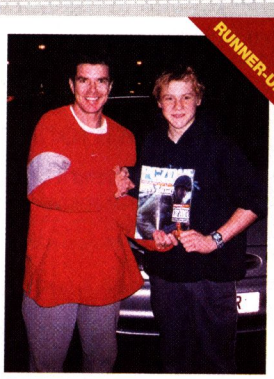
A LEGEND IN his own bedroom in the 70s, Southampton star Forbes Phillipson Masters now owns his own building and decorating business and has appeared in the audience for the *Skinner & Baddiel* show. If you live in the Dorset area and you need an outside wall constructing then look no further. Unfortunately we've only got the first bit of his phone number, 01202, although we reckon there's a 3 and a 5 in there as well. For his efforts Philip gets a football autographed by the *PC ZONE* five-a-side team.





RUNNER-UP

MARCELLE DESAILLY AND CHRISTOPHER DRABWELL



RUNNER-UP

BARRY VENISON AND MIKE MCCLUE

If we'd been given these names at the start of the compo we'd have taken either one and gone home happy. Desailly seemingly found a break in his busy shopping schedule to pose with Drabwell (although he's either shrunk in the wash or Drabwell's a monster). Hats off to Mike for the bottle to approach someone who looks like he's just had his house burnt down by a baying mob. Both runners-up will receive a game from the current top 10.

CHARTS

In Association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Your one-touch guide to game releases past, present and future. Whether a game is lost, looming or selling like sim-cakes, this is where you'll find it

ChartTrack TOP 10







		Title	Weeks in Chart	Score
1	NEW	**MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT**	1	94%
2	▼	THE SIMS: HOT DATE	13	71%
3	▼	THE SIMS	106	86%
4	▼	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 01/02	19	92%
5	NEW	COSSACKS: THE ART OF WAR	2	83%
6	▼	HARRY POTTER & THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE	14	80%
7	▲	THE SIMS: LIVIN' IT UP	76	63%
8	NEW	BLACK & WHITE: CREATURE ISLE	2	85%
9	NEW	MONSTERS, INC.	3	N/A
10	▲	THE SIMS: HOUSE PARTY	46	50%

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

Why is *The Sims* still selling so well? Are the only people that are stupid enough to buy games as opposed to pirate them the same ones that are stupid enough to buy *The Sims*? Disclaimer: I don't endorse piracy in any way, this is intended as a joke. Everyone should pirate *The Sims* though.
Stixx_

Oh dear. *Monsters, Inc.* When will people learn that however much you/your kids liked a film, a quickly knocked out cash-in game is only going to dilute the experience rather than enhance it, and will ultimately only disillusion your child, potentially leading to violent and anti-social behaviour. Buy your kids *Medal Of Honor* instead, it's bleedin' brilliant.
cletus_

I suppose *Medal Of Honor* deserves it, even though the end lets it down. This *Sims* thing is getting out of hand. I've never even played it never mind bought it. I don't know anyone who owns it, so who is buying it?
HRGiger_

Two years in the charts? That is truly astonishing. But I think *The Sims* should be removed from the charts henceforth, as it's not really a game, so much as a glorified, nominally interactive and slightly pervy screensaver.
metroid_larva

Virgin megastores TOP 10

1	MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT
2	MAX PAYNE
3	MONSTERS, INC. MINIGAMES
4	MONSTERS, INC. ACTION GAME/JUNIOR GAME
5	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 01/02
6	BLACK & WHITE/B&W: CREATURE ISLE
7	STAR WARS: STARFIGHTER
8	THE SIMS: HOT DATE
9	HARRY POTTER & THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE
10	CIVILIZATION III

COMPETITION

Virgin megastores

Win the entire Virgin Top 10!

Once again, *PC ZONE* and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Virgin Top 10. All you have to do to enter the draw is answer the following simple question:

QUESTION: What's the name of the developer behind EA's *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*?

Just answer the above question and send it on a postcard, along with all the information requested, to the address below.

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Are you a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*?

Answers on a postcard to: PC ZONE Chart Compo (CPCZ4A), Dennis Publishing, PO Box 154, Bradford BD1 5RZ. Closing date: April 4 2002

Terms and conditions: winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.

CHART COMMENT

BASED ON CHART-TRACK TOP 10

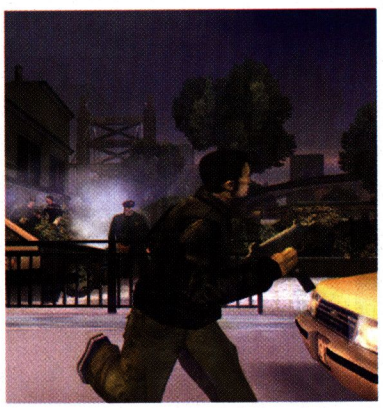
A TYPICALLY MIXED line-up greets the launch of the new-look charts/MIA/Incoming pages. As expected, the brilliant *Medal Of Honor* shoots straight to the top spot, though unexplained release delays means we never really got to see *MOH* and *Wolfenstein* duke it out in the Top 10. *Wolf* is actually hanging on at number 11, and as more multiplayer maps are released I suspect it will claw its way back up. Indeed, the fight is far from over and it will be interesting to see which of the two WWII behemoths has the greater longevity online.

Otherwise it's business as usual in the Top 10, with four *Sims* titles and the slightly depressing appearance of *Monsters, Inc.* (though to be fair we haven't actually played the game and it could very well be the best thing ever). There are actually a number of other *Monsters, Inc.* games floating around (as you can see in the Virgin top 10), so you can take some solace from the fact that only one has made an impact on the official charts. The rest of the line-up is, though predictable, universally excellent, so while there's very little to get excited about, there's not a whole lot to complain about either.

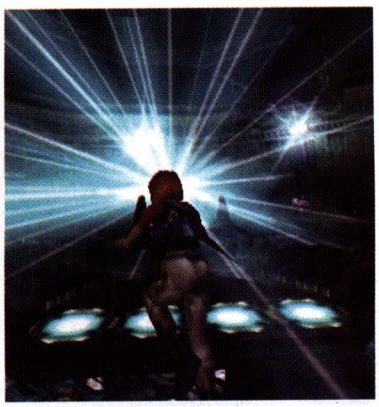
Anthony Holden

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...







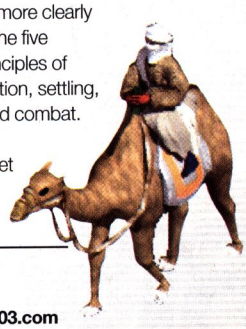
Grand Theft Auto 3

ALTHOUGH GTA3 has been out on the PlayStation 2 for some time now, everything has gone extremely quiet on the status of the PC version. However, we're very happy to report that DMA is not pulling a *Halo* job on us with its highly acclaimed crime simulation (ie dropping it in a hole until the console version has fulfilled its sales quota), but is in fact doing exactly what we all prayed for. That is, incorporating substantial multiplayer and online components in addition to polishing the graphics and gameplay, hence creating the version of the game that PC gamers deserve. Now all we need is a massively multiplayer version and all will be well with the world.

DMA Design • ETA April/May • www.grandtheftauto3.com

Anno 1503

THE ADDICTIVE AND hugely engrossing *Anno 1602* was a criminally underrated RTS/God game, and this 3D sequel has for some time threatened to improve on it in every way. But where the hell is it? *Anno 1503* (aka *1503 AD*) was scheduled for last October, but has now slipped to April. Developer Max Design has apparently been busy tweaking the gameplay and balance, which is now more clearly focussed on the five gameplay principles of trade, exploration, settling, diplomacy, and combat. We're off to Germany to get the full skinny next issue.



Max Design • ETA April • www.anno1503.com

Titanium Angels

THIS SHINY 3D action/adventure was looking absolutely stunning early in its development, and was apparently headed for both PC and PlayStation 2. Recent screenshots however, have been extremely disappointing, and all mention of a PC version have quietly disappeared from developer Mobius Entertainment's website (although it imprecisely describes them as 'currently working on a PS2 version of *Titanium Angels*'). Word has it that the PC version has been put on hold but not abandoned, though Mobius is very busy with another secret project destined for the PC. A PC *Titanium Angels* may depend on the success of the console release.

Mobius Entertainment • MIA • www.mobiusent.com

US TOP 10

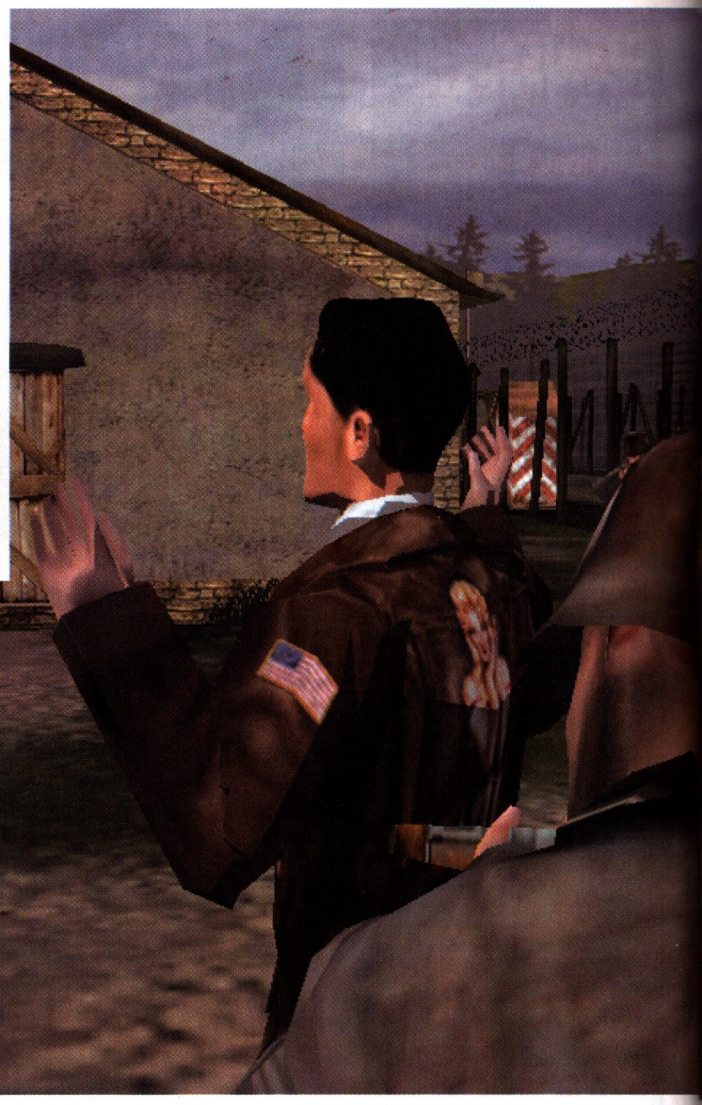
1	MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT
2	THE SIMS: HOT DATE
3	HARRY POTTER & THE SORCERER'S STONE
4	THE SIMS
5	ROLLER COASTER TYCOON
6	SIM GOLF
7	ZOO TYCOON
8	BACKYARD BASKETBALL
9	THE SIMS: LIVIN' LARGE
10	CIVILIZATION III

INCOMING!

These are the big games that are going on sale in the next month or so. All dates are correct at the time of going to press, but we'd check ahead before running down the shops in the driving rain.

GAME	PUBLISHER	RELEASE DATE
Warrior Kings	**Microids**	March 1
ST: Bridge Commander	**Activision**	March 8
Worms Blast	**Ubi Soft**	March 15
Jedi Knight II	**Activision**	March 28
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	**Activision**	March 28
Heroes Of Might & Magic IV	**3DO**	March 28
Europa Universalis II	**Ubi Soft**	March 29
Ghost Recon: Desert Siege	**Ubi Soft**	March 29
Global Operations	**EA**	April 5
Dungeon Siege	**Microsoft**	April 17







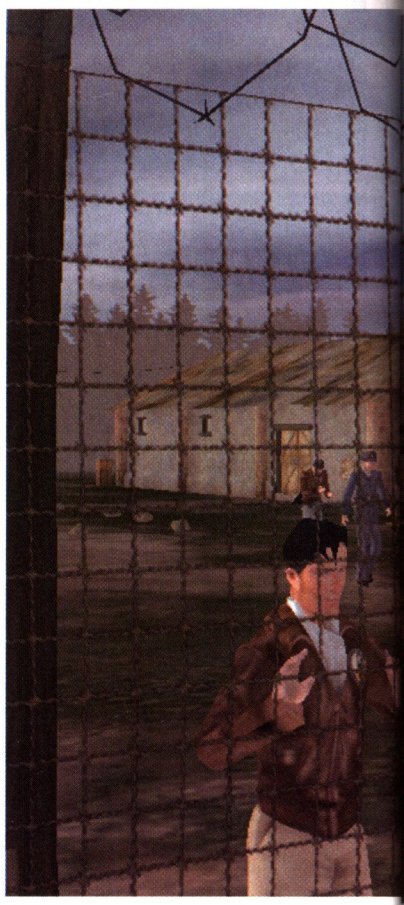
PRISONER OF WAR

Metal Gear Solid meets *Hogan's Heroes* – you know it makes sense

THE SIMPLE FACT IS everyone loves a good Prisoner Of War camp. Through one of the strangest acts of post-war revisionism ever perpetrated by Hollywood, we have a vision of Nazi POW camps as a kind of wartime blend of Scout camp and *The Great Egg Race*, with a bunch of rascally lads having a lark away from home, slinking between huts under cover of darkness, sneaking sips of smuggled liquor and trading chocolate bars, all the while building unlikely contraptions out of toilet rolls and empty bean cans. Every now and then you get buried alive in a tunnel or have to snap someone's arm across some bed slats so that Stallone can play in your football team, but apart from that it's all a good laugh.

Now, finally, Brighton-based developer Wide Games has seen sense, offering us the chance to play out our POW camp fantasies in a stealth action adventure that would do Steve McQueen proud. There's no weapons in the game (except those pointing at you), so it's all about planning, strategy and sneakiness, as you dig, climb, skulk and bribe your way out of three of Germany's most notorious POW camps – including a meticulously recreated Castle Colditz. Intelligent gameplay mechanics, superb enemy AI and *Metal Gear Solid*-inspired stealth elements all bode well for this title, and although the graphics are yet to receive a final spit and polish, the all-important atmosphere is plain for all to see.

Wide Games • ETA June • www.widegames.com





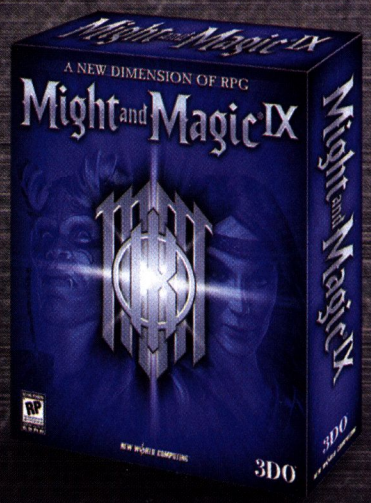


Prisoner Courtyard West



EXPERIENCE MIGHT AND MAGIC IN ALL-NEW 3D!

Explore a graphically realistic universe filled with dark, foreboding dungeons and lush outdoor environments. Create and lead a party of four player characters and up to three non-player characters in your quest. Develop each character's skills in the talents of either Might or Magic. Master the new intuitive interface, new Spell Combat system, and new Conversation system. IT'S A WHOLE NEW ADVENTURE WITH AN ALL-NEW LOOK.



Might and Magic® IX

INTRODUCING AN ALL-NEW MIGHT AND MAGIC® ADVENTURE IN A COMPLETELY 3D WORLD.



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PIRACY: WHO'S ROBBING WHO?

Oh no! Look out! Behind you! What is it? It's piracy killing the games business, of course. But is it, really? *PC ZONE*'s semi-fearless investigator *Stuart Campbell* hisses from the cheap seats and throws popcorn at the villains.

"The truth is that videogames are almost certainly the most-pirated consumer commodity in history"

KABOOM!

PIRACY MYTHS EXPLODED.

PIRACY MYTH 1: You're allowed to own a pirate copy of a game for 24 hours for 'evaluation' purposes as long as you delete it after that time.
TRUTH: No you're not. It's possible that this extremely-widespread misconception derives from an exception in the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act that allows intellectual property rights to be waived for 'purposes of review', but the clause is only intended to enable, for example, the quoting of bits of dialogue in a movie review. Try telling a judge you have an illegal copy of *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* purely for 'purposes of review' and he'll laugh you right into jail. (Unless you're a games journalist, of course.)

IT'S AN old standard, of course. But the truth about piracy? "Always start with an anecdote", it says here in the *Feature-Writer's Handbook*, so let's do just that. A few years ago, while taking a brief break from the crazy world of games journalism and experimenting with doing something useful for a change, I worked for a now-defunct software development company, called Sensible Software. One of the games I had a small hand in developing was a football title called *Sensible World Of Soccer*, the long-awaited sequel (all sequels are 'long-awaited' in the games industry) to the hugely successful first *Sensible Soccer*. Shortly after the game was released, a magazine published a feature containing people's reactions to it. Several of the respondents complained loudly and bitterly that a bug had been left in the game whereby, if you pressed a certain key, you could automatically win every game you played.

The thing was, the so-called 'bug' was actually a playtesting feature that only existed in beta copies of the game, and had been carefully removed from the production version. These people, who'd written in to a magazine, giving their names and addresses and everything, were indignantly complaining about a feature that was only present in illegal pirate versions of the game, which had been circulating since its release. So obviously, we sent some large programmers round with bats and had all their legs broken. (NB We will deny this in court.)

But how did the games industry come to be in such a state, where piracy was so endemic that the owners of illegally-copied games felt able to complain about them on a consumer-standards level? It's like stealing a car, then suing the owner for having worn tyres when you crash it into a lorry while making your getaway. The truth is that videogames are almost certainly the most-pirated consumer commodity in history, leaving music CDs, videos and expensive French perfume trailing in their wake, and widespread illegal copying is now an acknowledged fact of life within the industry. But why? Well, before we start, let's get back to basics.

THREE FLAVOURS OF PIRACY

There are actually three rather different areas covered under the umbrella term of 'piracy' where the PC is concerned. The law regarding each area is essentially the same, but to most gamers there are pretty significant moral differences. The games industry draws no distinction between the forms, though, and is as dedicated to closing one down as another.



1. EMULATION

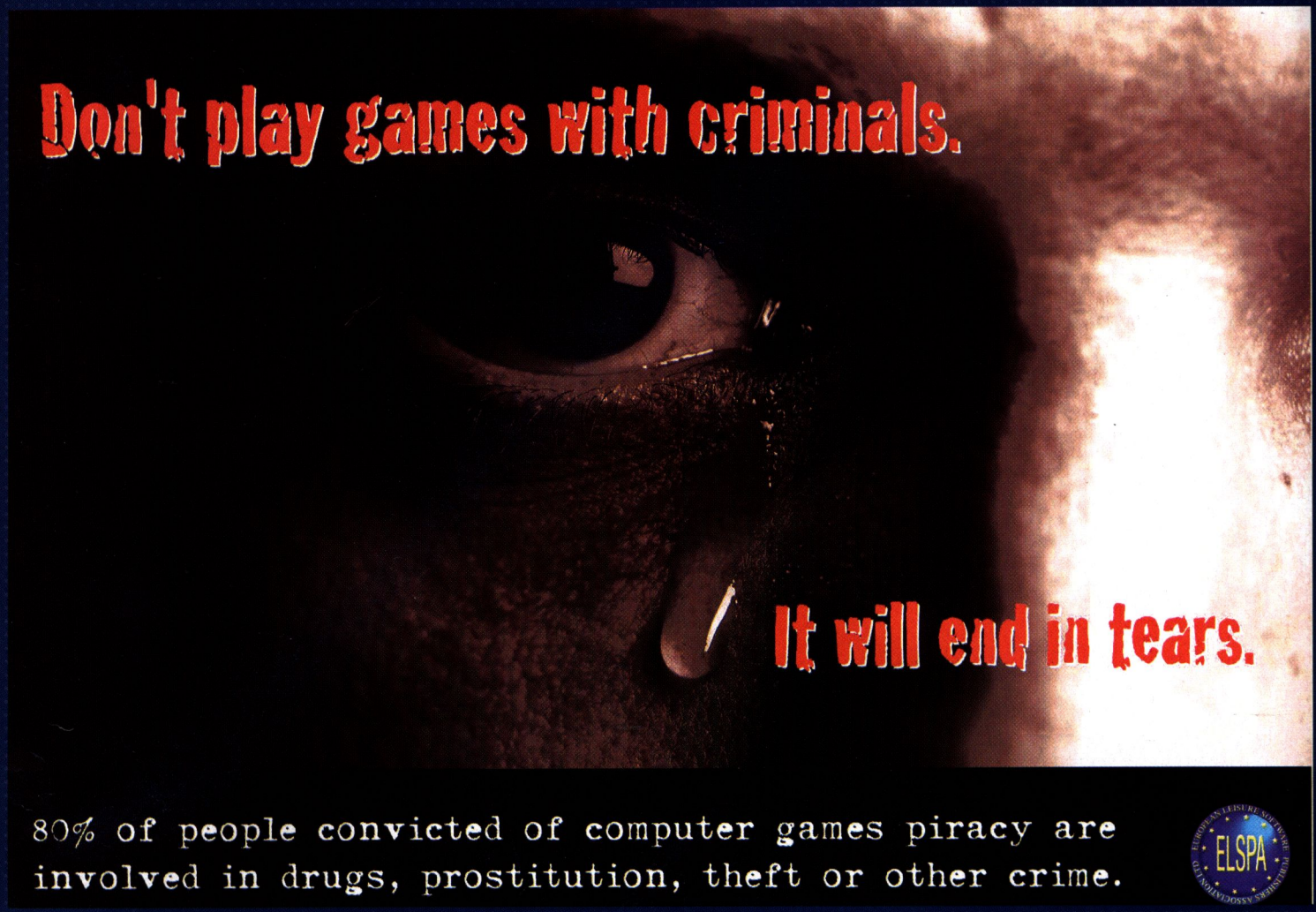
Much like the atomic bomb, the development and rise of emulation came about as the technical achievement blinded people to the legal implications. Coders wrote emulators just to see if they could do it, rather than with the intention of ripping off software companies, and gamers' subsequent clamour for illegally-copied game files to play on these emulators actually took several authors entirely by surprise (leading to, among others, the withdrawal of the groundbreaking Nintendo 64 emulator UltraHLE within days of its release). The emulation community tends to make a distinction between the emulation of older, defunct formats/games and those which still produce revenues for publishers, but the games industry exercises no such discrimination, closing down websites offering Sega Master System games as readily as it went after Nintendo 64 ROMs. Indeed, so much does the industry hate emulation that, even after losing a number of court cases, Sony leant heavily on retailers to prevent them from stocking the PlayStation emulator Bleem!, even though to play PS games with it you had to go and buy the originals, increasing Sony's potential PlayStation game-buying audience by millions of people at a stroke. (This is perhaps the only known example in history of the games industry ever putting 'moral' values before profits.) Since almost none of these games were ever actually published on PCs, emulation is broadly regarded as the least heinous form of piracy.

2. ABANDONWARE

An area of the illegal 'underground' almost exclusively devoted to PC games, abandonware, operates under a molecule-thin veneer of respectability. Offering downloads of games at least five years old and no longer available for purchase (hence deemed to be 'abandoned' by their owners), abandonware site hosts claim, in hurt tones, to be unable to understand how they could possibly be held to be causing the games industry any damage or loss of revenue. And, indeed, they have a case. The industry generally takes the view that



Now I'm not asking for a monkey, or a pony, no, a tenner gets you the lot.



And out of that 80 per cent how many were convicted under the umbrella of the "other crime".

intellectual property is intellectual property, regardless of how old it is. (Copyright actually subsists in any intellectual property until decades after the copyright-holder's death.) It's not quite the same as arresting a tramp for stealing rubbish out of your bin, but it's not far off.

3. WAREZ

This is the real deal. Warez sites pride themselves on offering brand-new PC games for download on the day of release ('0-day warez') or even before. Since this is, in theory at least, directly depriving the publishers of sales, it's generally considered the most serious form of piracy, and is certainly the most widespread.

YOU GOT LOVE TECHNIQUE

Those, then, are the major forms of piracy. The techniques of it are even more various, and form part of a circular chase of technology, which has been going on since the early 1980s. At first, games had to be manually and individually 'cracked' using special copier programs, leading the industry to invent special recording and code-encryption techniques to interfere with the copiers. Then the advent of double-deck tape recorders (it's hard to imagine there was a time in recent memory when such things hadn't been invented yet) made copying the tapes child's play, thereby forcing the industry to experiment with external forms of protection, such as code books (where you had to type in a special key after loading, before the game would actually play), hardware add-ons without which the game wouldn't run, or bizarre distorting lenses, through which you had to look to unscramble an on-screen code (no, really). Hackers now had to hack out all the protection code by hand, and this fractionally slowed the piracy of the games, but never by more than a day or two, since there's essentially no such thing as unhackable code. The industry has been using variants and combinations of these two approaches (on-media and off-media) ever since, with a lack of success that's been more or less total.

ROUND AND AROUND WE GO

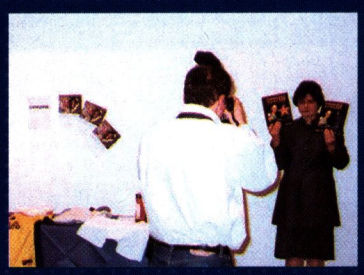
Indeed, the primary achievement of on-game protection is to stop the – comparatively limited, and hence less damaging to the industry 'playground' piracy of games between friends, and force those who want illegal copies to seek out professional pirates, hence exposing themselves to an almost infinitely wider range of dodgy software. Much like the argument against sending juvenile tearaways to prison, because it simply exposes them to the influence of far more serious criminals and effectively abandons the possibility of rehabilitation. (or the argument for legalising cannabis to restrict people's contact with harder drug dealers), this is an observation that holds little sway in the face of the Victorian moral approach, which the industry generally chooses to pursue where piracy is concerned.

So where does this all leave us? Like the war against crime and the war against drugs, the war against piracy can, fundamentally, never be anything but an

EVEN BETTER THAN THE REAL THING

THE GREAT IRONY

The economic driving forces behind piracy are well-documented, of course. But a lesser-spoken incentive, and the biggest difference between game piracy and other kinds of piracy, is that – uniquely – pirated games often actually offer the consumer a tangibly better product than the 'real' version which costs ten times the price. Buy knock-off perfume and you'll get heavily-diluted industrial drain cleaner that'll strip the gold off your watch. Buy a pirate video and there's a good chance it was filmed with a camcorder in the local Odeon and consists mostly of footage of the back of someone's head and the rustling of sweet wrappers from the next seat. But buy a pirated game, and not only will the code, the graphics, the sound and the gameplay be identical in every respect to the shop-bought version, but it'll also be free of annoying protection systems (ironically employed to deter piracy, but which only legitimate buyers actually have to suffer). It'll also probably come complete with any required patches already applied (because it's a lot easier for pirates to replace stock with 'fixed' versions than it is for shops), many have various cheat and training options added, or will simply be out three months before it's due to be officially released in this country. Although this last point is more often seen with console games than PC titles. This is a difficult area for the industry to address, and one of the reasons it's so hard for it to persuade the public that pirates are nasty criminal rip-off merchants.



The spoils of war.

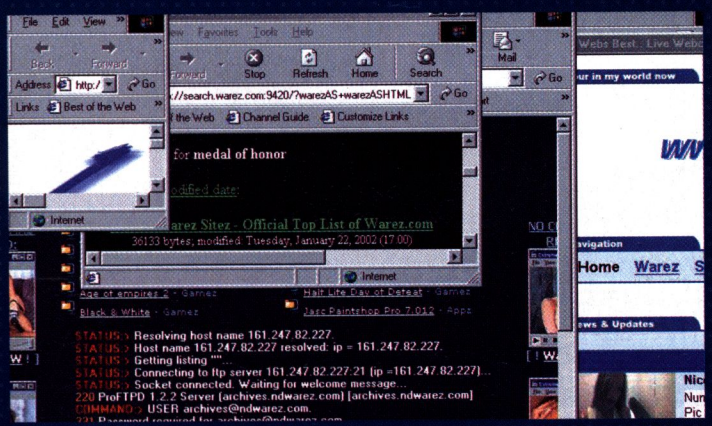
MY ART WAS THE KNIFE

ONE AFTERNOON ON THE HIGH SEAS

"Here's an idea," said *PC ZONE* as they commissioned this feature. "Why don't you spend, say, one afternoon on the Net and see just what you can download in that time? Oh, and if anyone asks, you ain't seen us, OK?"

So I gave it a try. But the truth is, the days of the Web being the home of piracy are over. Games nowadays are so absurdly vast (1GB installs are far from uncommon) that the massive bandwidth required to host and transmit them leads to sites being closed down almost as soon as they open. If you look for '*warez*' on the WWW, what you'll actually get is sites offering lists of other sites, which offer lists of other sites, which offer lists of other sites. Almost none of them actually have working game downloads, and almost all of them will open at least half-a-dozen browser windows for hardcore porn sites while you browse. Once, as an experiment, I didn't close down any pop-ups while I looked for a copy of *Medal Of Honor*, and within just three minutes of starting the search, I had an impressive 56 browser windows open simultaneously, at which point my PC keeled over and crashed under the strain of animating 350 XXX-rated banner ads. Needless to say, I never once came within sniffing distance of a working download link.

Even Usenet services, where you can still find actual files rather than invitations to watch '100 per cent GENUINE' footage of Britney Spears having sex with dogs, creak to the point of collapse under the massive weight of today's PC games. Files have to be chopped up into so many hundreds of pieces to fit onto news servers that they are shoved off by the next game in line long before even a broadband or cable connection has time to get all the parts. What the games industry couldn't do with policing, it achieved with the silicon equivalent of steroids, pumping up games until they were simply physically too much for the Web to cope with.

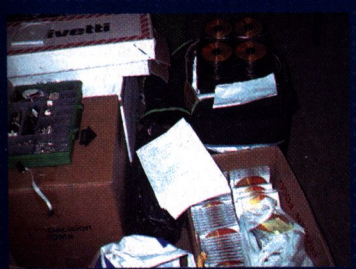


Log onto a warez site and your PC will explode with dodgy pop-ups.

eternal one. You can never make code uncrackable, you can never implement a protection system that can't be removed by a skilled hacker. Neither the industry nor the forces of law have the resources to chase, catch and prosecute the thousands of illegal software traders who can be found all over the country every weekend. And as with drugs, mounting a 'war against piracy' has the problem that it comes up against basic human nature. Just as people will always want to get out of their heads from time to time to counter the stresses and tensions of life, so they will always want to get something cheap or free, especially if – crucially – they consider the 'real' price to be an outrageous rip off. (After all, who bothers to pirate books when you can buy them for a fiver?) Which brings us to the beating heart of the matter.

THE PRICE IS... RIGHT?

Let's try to be brief with this. Everything about piracy pretty much boils down to the price of games. (While piracy has always been with us, it was pretty much confined to the playground in the days of





As a trip to any car-booter will show you, illegal market trading is big business.

WARRIORZ OF THE WASTEGROUND

CRIME, UNDER PLASTIC SHEETING

Having left the cosy, comfortable surroundings of home (see MY ART WAS THE KNIFE) in search of illegal software, I braved one of the foulest days in living memory to visit a local open-air market, one of thousands set up every week in car parks and bits of waste ground the length and breadth of the country, to see if I'd have more luck. In driving, freezing rain and gale-force January winds, almost all of the market's usual traders had given up and gone home, but around 20 hardy souls were sticking it out, weighting their tables down with huge rocks and occasionally leaping to avoid sudden deluges of water as the wind whipped up the covering tarpaulins and dislodged the huge puddles that had been gathering in them. Almost two thirds of the market's remaining stalls were occupied by illegal software traders, and within minutes of arriving I'd managed to obtain more than £2,000 worth of PC software for just £25. (Five quid a disc or five for £20 seemed to be the going rate at all the stalls, with application software more popular than games. Dreamcast and Playstation games were also available for £2 each, and PS2 games at the same price as the PC stuff. Taking my life into my hands and risking my kneecaps for you, the readers of *PC ZONE*, I then revealed my secret journalistic identity ("Hi," I said, "I'm Anthony Holden from *PC ZONE* magazine.") and, promising a fair hearing and no photographs, delicately managed to persuade one of the traders, a late-30s man with a Midlands accent, to take shelter from the gruesome weather in a nearby café, and repent his crimes and unburden his immortal soul over a bacon sandwich. For the purposes of identification, we'll call him Mister Pirate Guy.

PCZ: So, there must be a lot of money in pirate games for you to be out on a day like this.
MPG: Christ, I don't think there's enough money in 'anything' to be out on a day like this.

PCZ: If there is, though, pirate games must be it. There's almost no-one here but illegal software traders.
MPG: Well, the profit margins are certainly bigger than selling broken biscuits or garden furniture, I'll say that much. So yeah, I guess we've got more motive than most. It's not that lucrative, though. You won't see any of these guys driving away in BMWs.

PCZ: So come on, how lucrative is "not that lucrative?" How much money do you take in an average day?
MPG: On a good day we can make a few hundred quid. We were really busy before Christmas, obviously, but there are a lot of stalls here competing for the trade. And then you get days like today where there's hardly anyone out, no-one's got any money to spend after New Year anyway, and we'll be lucky to pay for the cost of the stall and the petrol for the van.

PCZ: It's an out-in-the-open sort of business in more ways than one. Being here so blatantly in public, selling a product that's obviously illegal to even the slowest-witted policeman, don't you get arrested a lot?
MPG: Nah, Trading Standards or the police hardly ever bother us. Because, you know, at the end of the day we're not doing anyone any harm and they have bigger fish to fry.

PCZ: Not doing anyone any harm? I know a lot of people in the videogames industry who'd disagree with you there.
MPG: Yeah, but I don't see many of them going out of business, do you? All you read in the papers is about games selling millions of copies and making more money than movies and CDs and whatever. They seem to be doing all right. Anyway, they're just greedy bastards, so f*** 'em.

PCZ: You could say, though, that they have done all the work, so why shouldn't they get the reward?
MPG: Because at least we sell stuff to people at a price they can afford. None of the families I know can afford to get their kids these games at 40 and 50 quid a time. And some of the PC technical stuff costs, like, hundreds of pounds. If they didn't cost so much, we wouldn't be here.

PCZ: So what, this is all some kind of Robin-Hood social welfare program, then? Videogames for poor kids?
MPG: Don't be stupid. But like I say, if people thought games were worth 40 quid, they wouldn't come to us, would they? They'd go to a nice warm shop and get a box and a receipt and stuff. As long as we can sell stuff at a tenth of the shops and still make a bit of money, we'll always be here. Even when we do get raided, it's not exactly hard to replace the stock, you know?

Note: To protect journalistic sources, all notes from this meeting, along with all the pirated CDs purchased, have been destroyed. None of them, incidentally, contained any viruses or pornography, though I did draw quite a vulgar doodle on my notebook while the bus was stuck in traffic on the way home.

KABOOM!

PIRACY MYTHS EXPLODED

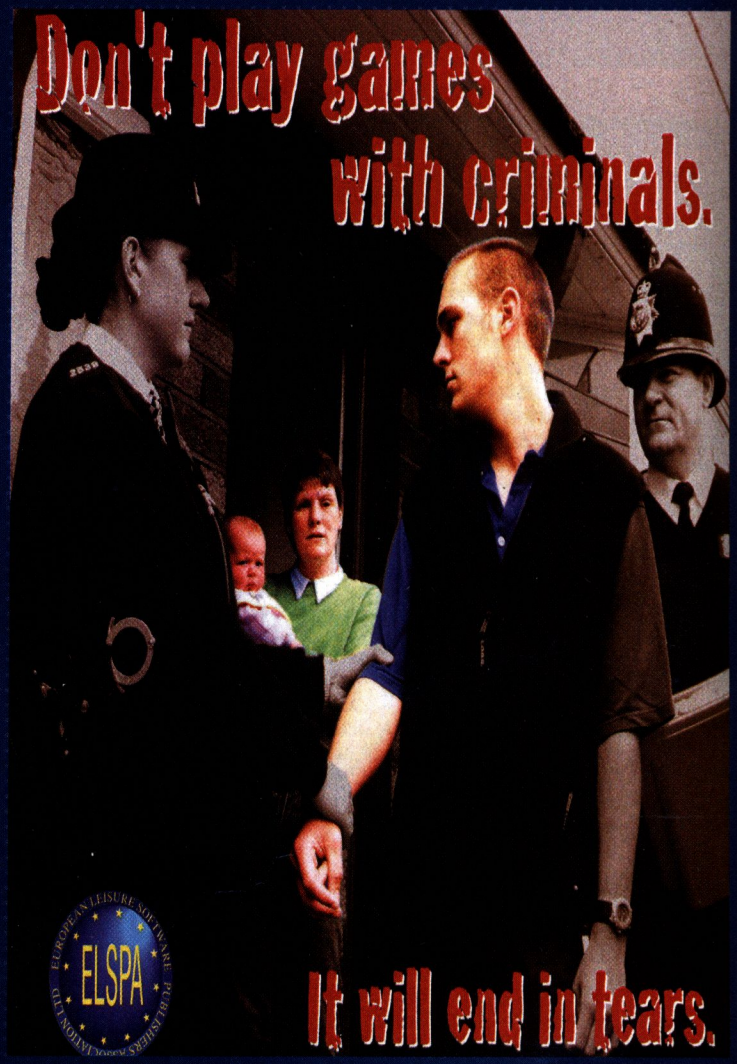
PIRACY MYTH 2: Pirate game CDs are often riddled with viruses, extreme pornography and similar unpleasantness.

TRUTH: I've been writing articles about piracy for around 10 years now, and in that time I've had cause to examine literally hundreds, probably thousands, of pirated games. You know how many times I've found a virus or extreme pornography on one? This many times: none. Pirates, including Internet warez sites, want their 'customers' to come back just as much as any legit business does. Ironically, the only people who'd have anything to gain from distributing virus-infected pirate games are software publishers, and even they're unlikely to do it since a court would look very unfavourably on them taking the law into their own hands by destroying someone's data.

the Spectrum etc. It didn't become big criminal business until the 16-bit era, when the price of new games suddenly tripled overnight.) Pirates say they do it because games are a rip-off. The industry says that they're not, because they cost millions to develop and they offer more entertainment hours per pound than other leisure items. Who's right?

Well, the industry has a point in that the best games offer a lot of playtime for your money. A good game can easily keep you occupied for 40 hours or more, which at roughly a quid an hour compares favourably with going to the movies, the theatre or a football match. But be honest, how many games released in an average year could you honestly say you'd had 40 hours of enjoyment out of? Development cost, also, is a total red herring. Juan Sebastian Veron cost Manchester United enough money to develop at least ten PC games, but it doesn't cost £400 to go and watch him play. (At least, not unless you buy a programme and at least two meat pies at the refreshment kiosk.) Hardback books have almost zero development cost, yet they sell for the exact same price as a Mariah Carey album that might have cost £20 million to record. Development cost is, let's be absolutely clear about it, entirely irrelevant to the retail price of just about anything. Games don't cost £40 because they have to, they cost £40 because software publishers want them to.

The truth is, games are pirated so much because the gap between their physical cost and their actual cost is so huge. When something costs 40p to physically manufacture and sells at £40, the scope for the unscrupulous to come in and undercut the retail version with a cheap but identical copy is so massive, and the potential for profit so great, that they can afford to take a lot of risks and absorb a lot of costs (fines, confiscated stocks, etc) to do so. And the gap between the physical costs and selling prices of games is, purely, a policy decision by software publishers. As the owners of the games, they are of course entitled to ask any price they like for them. But by leaving such a huge credibility gap in that pricing (pirated music CDs, by comparison, are far more rare at markets, car boots sales, etc, despite being at least as popular as games and even easier to copy), you'd have to say they were inviting the very problem they say they want so much to be rid of. Could it be that in truth, the industry knows piracy is actually beneficial to it? That's a question, unfortunately, we don't have room to answer this month, but wait patiently outside your newsagent until April 4 and all will be revealed. Stay tuned – concluding part of this feature is coming next month... PCZ



But I was only playing *Manic Miner* on an emulator.

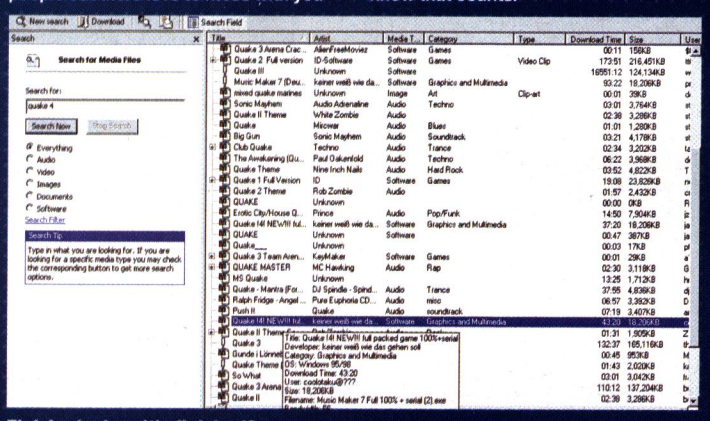
PEER PRESSURE

I'LL SHOW YOU MINE IF YOU SHOW ME YOURS...

The Internet, or at least the Web, is rubbish for downloading pirated software, but peer-to-peer file sharing is now bigger than ever. Packages such as *Morpheus* enable you to download any type of media directly from other people's hard drives. A cursory search conducted in the course of this feature brought me pirated fruit in the shape of demos of *Black & White* and *Colin McRae 2*, although as I was trying to download the full US version of *Medal Of Honor* in both cases my disappointment was palpable.

This seems to be the main problem. Aside from the reality of needing a broadband account the sad truth is that people out there love to mess with you and your big downloads – two users were even offering full versions of *Quake 4*, at just over 18MB each.

However, like anything, if you want it enough you can get it. Private, passworded sites offer pretty much any game you want and you can download stuff for free as long as you upload a comparable amount of data. How do you find these? Tricky. According to one source: "for the average dope it's probably a pain in the ass to get on the awesome sites. The thing is to wiggle your way onto one or two and then trade between them for credits, adding sites as you go. Hanging out on IRC and kissing some arse helps as well. The web is bullshit – it's who you know that counts."



Finished when it's finished?

> **"Games are pirated so much because the gap between their physical cost and their actual cost is so huge"**

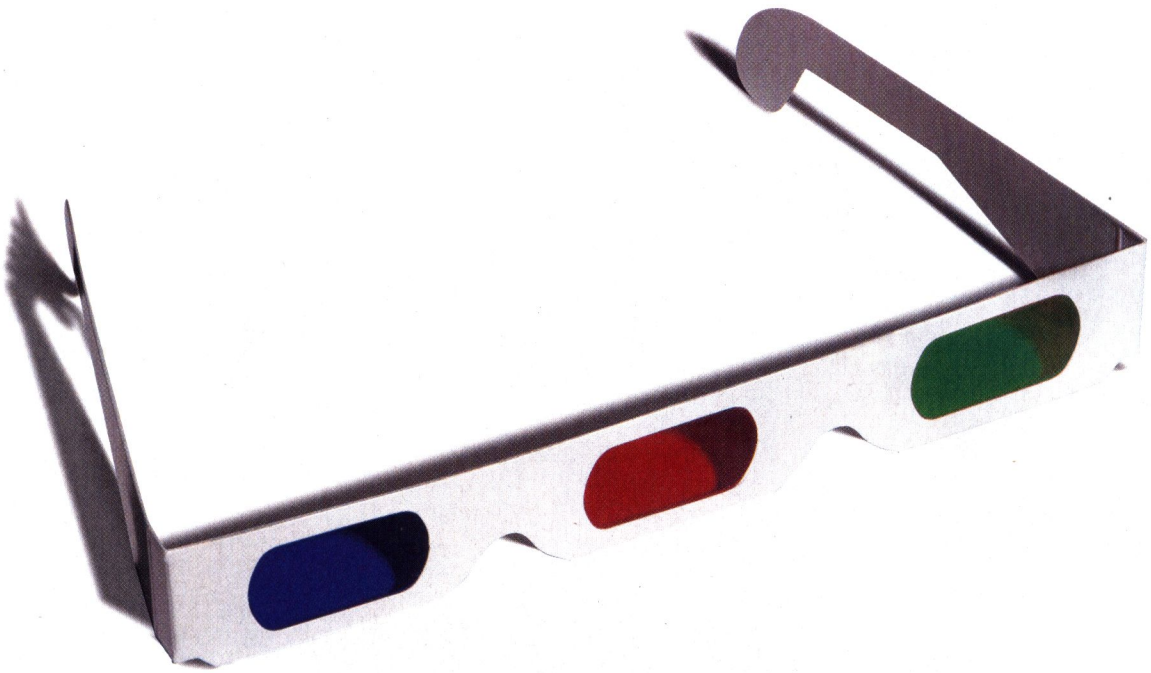
KABOOM!

PIRACY MYTHS EXPLODED.

PIRACY MYTH 3: It's illegal to make copies of software you legitimately own.

TRUTH: In fact, various UK and international laws explicitly permit the making of a backup copy of any legitimately-owned software, as long as the copy and the original are never in use at the same time. In fact, it's an extremely wise move to do so, as most publishers will either try to charge you an exorbitant 'administration fee' to replace copies of a game that has stopped working (usually more than it would cost to just re-buy the game, given how quickly game software depreciates), or simply shrug their shoulders and say: "We don't make that any more, we don't have any copies we can give you." (Such shoddy customer service is the norm rather than the exception with games firms – try ringing up the publishers of any game you own that's more than, say, 18 months old, and tell them the disc's gone wonky, and can you exchange it for a new one, please? See how far you get.)

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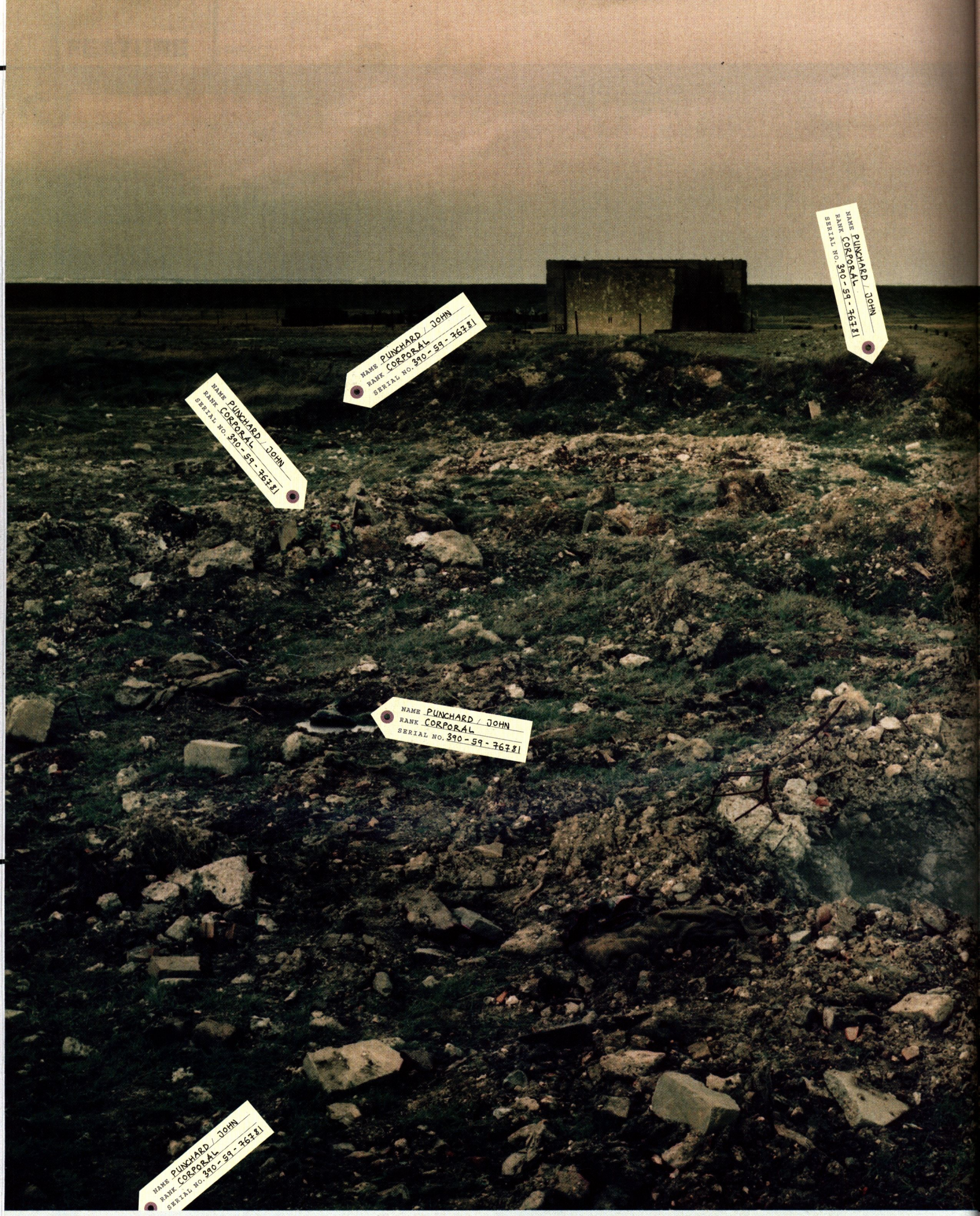
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THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Sierra Studios
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.swatuj.com
ETA September

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL

- It's the sequel to one of the finest tactical shooters ever
- 150 separate characters all with distinct AI
- New 3D engine with all sorts of fancy gubbins
- Proper multiplayer

War on the streets of LA

SWAT 4: URBAN JUSTICE

It's got a rich heritage and a bright future ahead. *Richie Shoemaker* takes a look at a game with which he has absolutely nothing in common

HAVE YOU noticed how once-proud hardcore PC games have been defecting to consoles? Take Bioware's life-sapping RPG series *Baldur's Gate* for instance. A heavier stat-based experience would be hard to locate, even with a level 14 Detection spell. Yet on PlayStation 2 *Baldur's Gate* is known not as an RPG, but as an action game – almost a 21st century version of the classic *Gauntlet*. Nowt much of a to-do about that as far as I'm concerned. In fact, I preferred the PS2 game to its big PC brother, since I'm not big on dice-rolling anyway. Even so, we're sure there are thousands of people grinding their battleaxes that the mighty *Gate* has been 'cheapened'.

Of course there is a reason for such a drastic transformation; console players would no more enjoy playing a 600-hour beardathon in front of a 32-inch TV than a PC gamer would take delight from guiding a hyperactive monkey through a supermarket. Which is exactly why the *SWAT* game headed for Xbox is called *Global Strike Team* and has as much in common with lightgun shooter *Virtua Cop* as it does previous PC-based *SWAT* games. However, since PCs and Xboxes share similar organs and therefore the potential for crossover is so strong, the fear was PC *SWAT 4* would be a port of the Xbox's arcade-orientated adaptation.

"No, not at all," says Rod Fung, executive producer for *SWAT: Urban Justice*, the fourth in the series. "*Global Strike Team* and *Urban Justice* are completely different games, though they are part of the *SWAT* franchise. Each is designed exclusively for their respective

CV

SIERRA STUDIOS

Today, Sierra (as VU games) is better known for publishing rather than developing. But over 20 years it's built up a few distinguished game brands.

1982 Sierra starts off on a long journey by releasing *Crossfire*, *Adventure In Serenia* and *Ultima II: Revenge Of The Enchantress*.

1992 The *Quest For Glory* series enters its third chapter, while this year also sees the release of *Kings Quest VI*.

hardware. Of course there are similarities, and players who like one version of the game will most certainly like the other."

POLICEMAN PLOT

But we forget with all this talk about console dumbing-down and genre-shifting that *SWAT* began life on PC back in the '80s. Its roots were drawn directly from the *Police Quest* series of action-adventures (see boxout), a genre all but deceased. Now under the name of *SWAT*, the series has risen to become about the best example of tactical action there is, and one of the few examples to be set among Western cities rather than former Soviet-bloc republics.

As with previous *SWAT* games, *Urban Justice* will once again be set across the concrete sprawl of near-future Los Angeles, the aim to restore public order to a city in chaos. We asked whether since last September there was any desire to introduce a bio-terrorist threat to the game, a question neatly dodged:

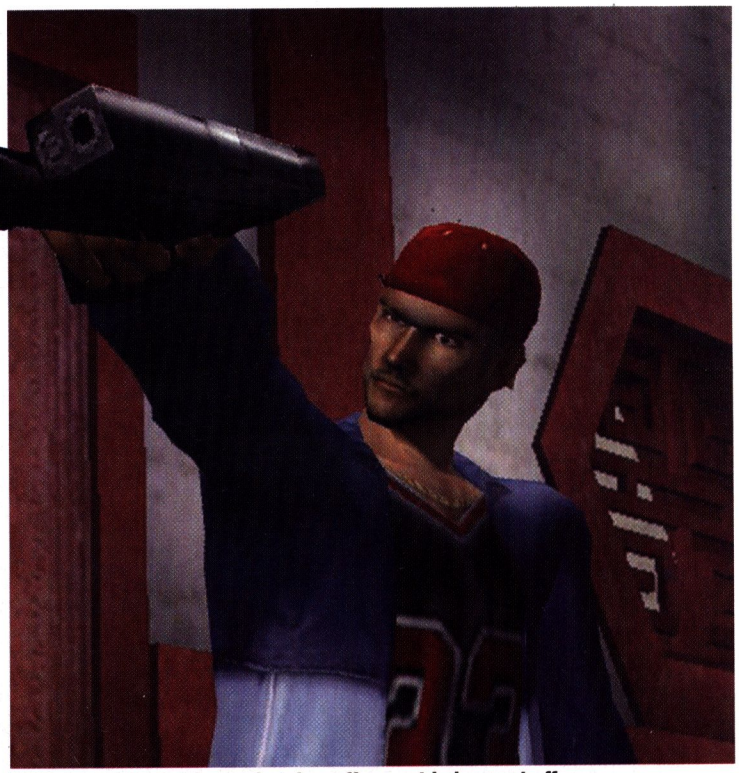
"The game is centred on gang warfare, so the look and feel is very 'gangland' Los Angeles," says Fung. "Gang violence has erupted into mainstream Los Angeles and SWAT is called in to secure the city. This has allowed us to introduce more interesting characters and situations. If you've visited Southern California you'll know the look and feel of the game."

Indeed we have visited Southern California. Apart from being rather clement in the weather department, we remember being lost one night driving back from watching a dire display of football between LA Galaxy and Dallas Burn, ending up around LA's Inglewood area. For those that haven't been there, it's a bit like Cardiff at closing time, only the houses are bigger.

GUN NUT ALERT

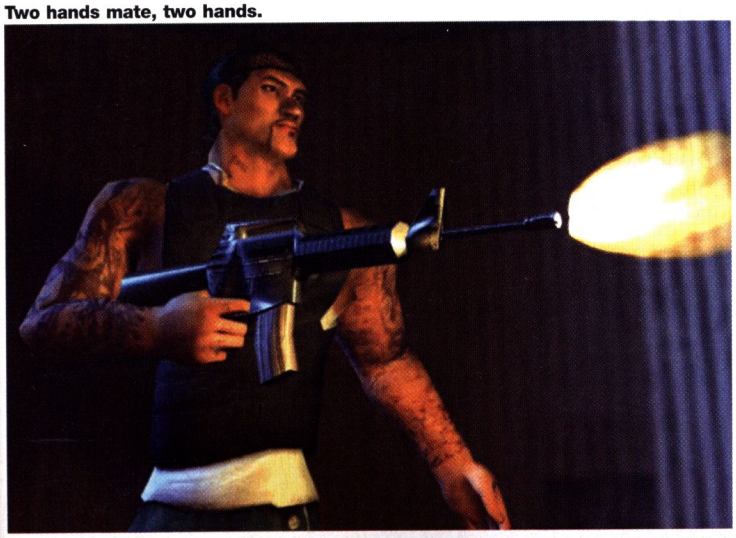
As was the case with its predecessor and the likes of *Rainbow Six* before it, *Urban Justice* is very much a team game, whether you play online or through the 16 planned missions of the single-player campaign. Before each mission you equip your player and your team, again with some of the most realistic weapons ever slipped into a computer game. In fact, the *SWAT 3* arsenal is being expanded – no mean feat seeing it was perhaps the most exhaustive gun rack in gaming.

"We have many new additional weapons," says Fung. "Such as the new HK PDW, the FN-P90, the Serbu BFG50, and even some 40mm projectile launchers that can deliver flashbang grenades and chemical agents. Also included is a unique feature that allows the player to configure each weapon with a wide variety of accessories such as infra-red laser pointers, flashlights, various stocks, magazines, optics and grips... the list of options per weapon is quite extensive."



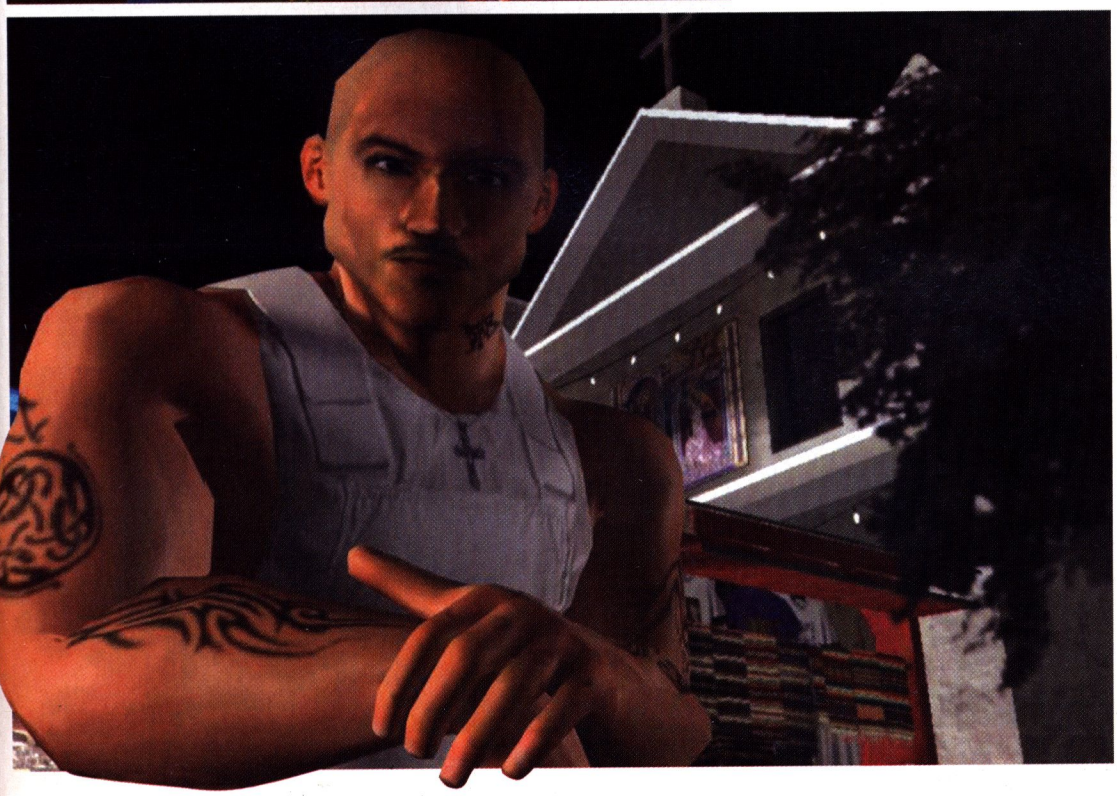
Our beloved England captain takes offence at being sent off.

Two hands mate, two hands.



"The theme of the game is centred on gang warfare, so the look and feel is very 'gangland' LA"

ROD FUNG
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER,
SIERRA STUDIOS



FOOTBALL MANAGER

Of course *SWAT* just wouldn't be *SWAT* without its on-the-fly tactical options – even today *SWAT 3* remains the best example of real-time tactics in the genre. For the record *Ghost Recon* was perhaps a touch too simplistic in this area, while *Flashpoint* went the other way. The good news is that the new game won't feel much different to veterans of the most recent adventure, although for the tactically inept (of which I am happily one), Sierra will be adding new options.

"We've added an additional element that makes the game more user-friendly," says Fung. "We have designed what I call 'football-type' (*American football, not real football – Ed*) plays where you can issue your team a command such as 'Breach to Contact'. With this command the team will breach the door and keep moving until





Spread 'em.

they reach a suspect. Thus you won't have to micro-manage your team. In the case where you might decide to influence team tactics more closely, you'll have the option to fully direct and control each member's movement at any time, as was the case in the original game."

EMOTION ENGINE

As well as the brand new 'Takedown' engine, which among other things will add full facial animations as well emotional responses to each character, *Urban Justice* will offer a far more dynamic mission structure. At least that's the assumption – our host wouldn't be drawn on the matter. However, it's certainly the case that the levels will be much larger than in *SWAT 3*. Quite by how much will remain a mystery for a while yet.

"As I said each mission is loosely based in locations in Los Angeles, including a famous recording studio, the Los Angeles Jewellery Mart, the famous Farmer's Market, the LA County Jail, Leon's Auto Salvage, the historical Olveria Street, an art museum, the Tantra Buddhist temple and many other recognisable locations." Even if the authenticity of these settings will be lost on the majority of UK gamers we welcome the sentiment nonetheless.

This realism, it seems, is not confined to the locations, but also the people found within them. To help create a level of unpredictability hitherto unknown in games, Sierra is creating separate AI routines for each of *SWAT 4*'s 170 characters. This is quite a big deal as generic appearance will no longer indicate how an enemy will react to your presence. Add the fact that each mission has random spawn points, and you realise that apart from not knowing how other characters will react just by looking at them, you won't even be able to predict who'll be around a particular corner. Sierra claims no mission will ever be the same twice, a claim we look forward to testing to the full.

URBAN STRIKE FORCE

To ensure *SWAT 4* enjoys a long and healthy life after the single-player game has passed, Sierra plans to include much multiplayer goodness for up to 24 players. Why 24 and not the standard 16 or 32 is unclear, though it's not something we'll lose sleep over.

"You'll be able to play as a member of an LA gang – of which there are three to choose from – a SWAT officer, an LAPD patrol officer, and in some cases even civilians," reveals Fung before letting slip what we all want to know... "Certainly *Counter-Strike* is a huge success and we will have some similar gameplay in *SWAT: Urban Justice*."

As it happens, the list of multiplayer modes includes team-based co-operative



"*Counter-Strike* is a huge success and we will have some similar gameplay in *SWAT: Urban Justice*"

ROD FUNG
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER,
SIERRA STUDIOS





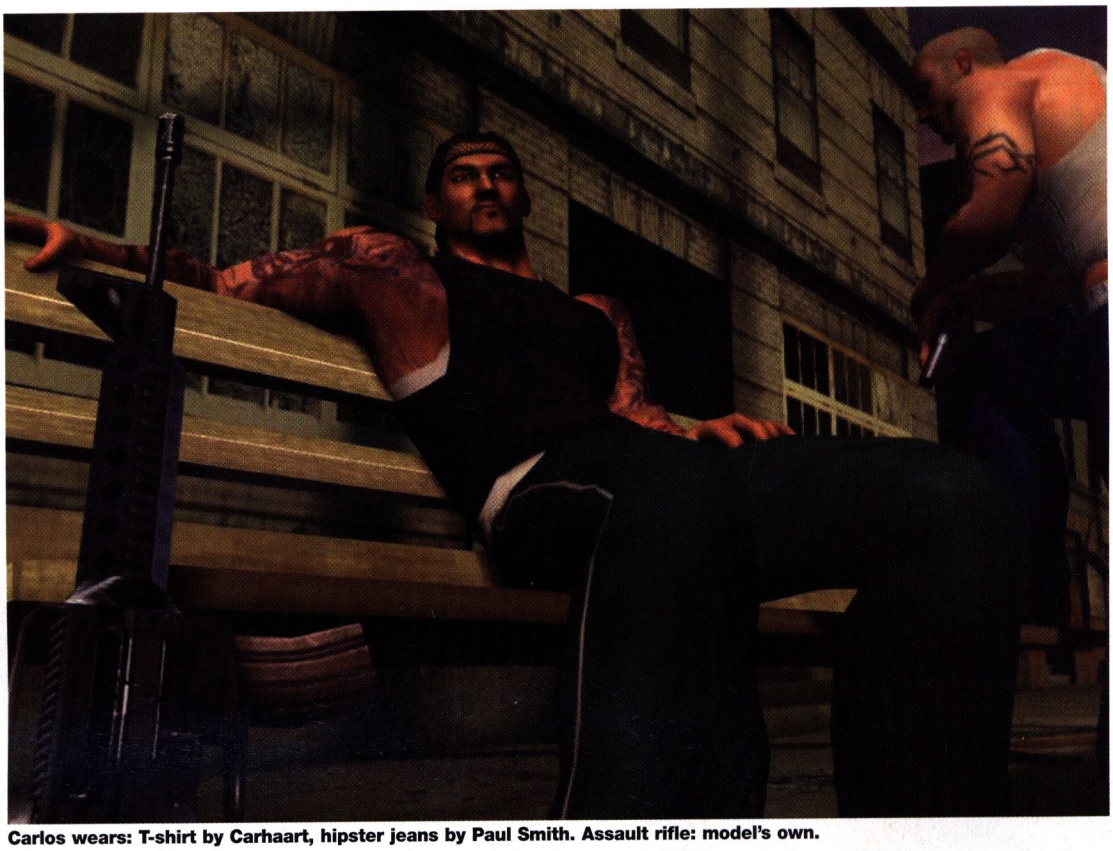
"It was my last 50p. I dropped it here somewhere."

matches against AI enemies or other players, traditional deathmatch, team deathmatch and three new modes known as Trophy, Hunted and Airsoft. There weren't any details forthcoming on these intriguing sounding variants, but as soon as we know, you'll know.

BUSH FIRE

Admittedly, *Urban Justice* sounds like George 'Dubya' Bush's codename for the latest US law enforcement crackdown. But rather than having the feel of a gung-ho LAPD recruitment video, our hopes are high that the game will retain the more morally ambiguous feel of earlier *Police Quest* games. The signs are good: the new graphics engine should breathe life into the locations and bless the AI players' faces with emotional responses. Combine that with the close quarter battles that characterise *SWAT*'s gameplay and we could be faced with something with quite a gritty, uncompromising feel. We'll see.

Even if the game manages to improve only slightly on its predecessor, we'll be more than happy. Little things like being able to see the weapons in the hand are more than welcome. Not to mention the extended multiplayer options and mix of old and new tactical options. All of which should ensure *SWAT* regains its place at the top of the tactical hierarchy.



Carlos wears: T-shirt by Carhaart, hipster jeans by Paul Smith. Assault rifle: model's own.

THE POLICE STORY SO FAR

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THE POLICE QUEST SERIES HAS BEEN AROUND FOR OVER 15 YEARS. LET'S TAKE A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE...

The *Police Quest* series started off as a hardcore adventure created by a former Highway Patrol officer Jim Wallis. The games were known for their dark humour and sometimes ambiguous moral dilemmas, combined with an authenticity and adherence to real-life policing procedures that few games today even hint at. Wallis left after the third game, though, and the dynasty took a nosedive in its middle years, relying too heavily on full-motion video and toying with a variety of genres. Salvation came in the form of *Swat 3*, which introduced the first-person tactical action we know and love.

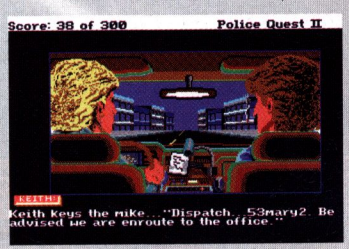
POLICE QUEST: IN PURSUIT OF THE DEATH ANGEL (1987)

The *Police Quest* games were never big in the UK, perhaps because you played a US cop rather than a British bobby. Still, the first in the series was a competent if somewhat ponderous adult adventure, and one so real that the games were soon used as training for cops across America.



POLICE QUEST 2: THE VENGEANCE (1988)

A slightly less gritty and easier sequel that changed the focus from beat cop to detective with you after a cop killer, tracking him from forensic labs to a seaside finale. A pacier adventure with a bit more action than before, hinting perhaps at what was to come years later.



POLICE QUEST 3: THE KINDRED (1990)

Some would say the best of the four adventures, this could well have been the inspiration for *Max Payne* as you combine your police work with the fight to avenge your wife's death. Interesting aside: pop bloater Jan Hammer did the music for the game, he of *Miami Vice* fame.



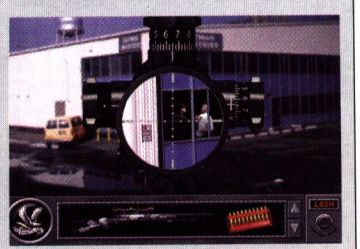
POLICE QUEST 4: OPEN SEASON (1993)

The creator of *Police Quest* had moved on, leaving things to an ex-LAPD Chief (who incidentally set up the real SWAT teams in the '60s). One of those hateful full-motion video adventures, *PQ4* was a disappointment for many veteran players, despite retaining the hardcore roots.



POLICE QUEST: SWAT (1995)

Still with the FMV, the first *SWAT* game was a total departure from previous *Police Quest* titles in that it was basically a movie with a few interactive choices and simple action elements. Looked pretty damn good at the time, in a *Rebel Assault*-type way. But people weren't fooled as it wasn't much in the way of a game.



POLICE QUEST: SWAT 2 (1998)

Borrowing the mechanics of games like *X-Com*, *SWAT* changes genre once more. A tactical strategy game that saw you planning your way through a series of raids, *SWAT 2* really wasn't very good. The presentation was dire with poor graphics, a terrible interface and basic AI.



SWAT 3: CLOSE QUARTERS BATTLE (1999)

Police Quest was dropped as a name and first-person tactical action was the new genre. Thanks to games such as *Rainbow Six*, real-world action was in vogue and *SWAT 3*'s success was assured. It helped that the game was brilliant. Now out on budget as the *Elite Edition*.

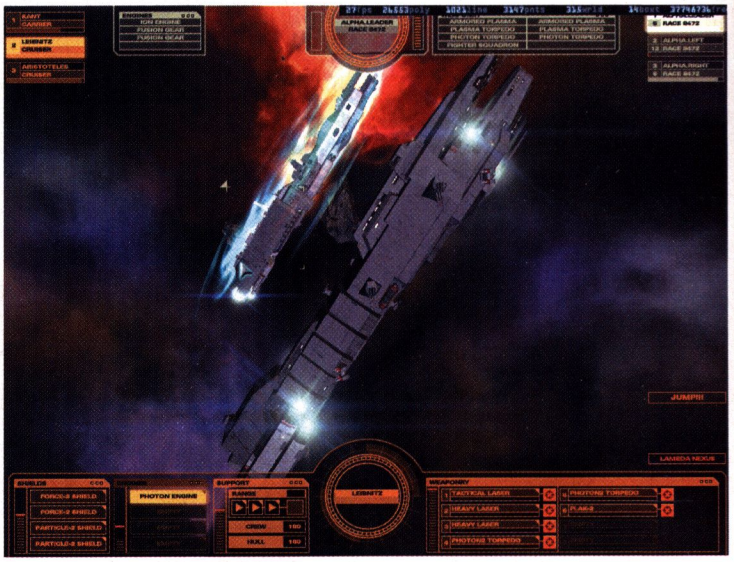


Hungary's space race blasts off with...

IMPERIUM GALACTICA 3:

The long-running space saga is finally back. *Paul Presley* heads to mission control





THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Philos Labs
PUBLISHER CDV
WEBSITE www.cdv.de
OUT Spring 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- New team brings a fresh approach to the series
- Deep-rooted strategy
- Storyline adds structure to combat
- Visually remarkable



Graphically, *Imperium Galactica 3* is looking nothing short of stunning.

"There is no ground combat in the game this time, because we've concentrated on space battles"

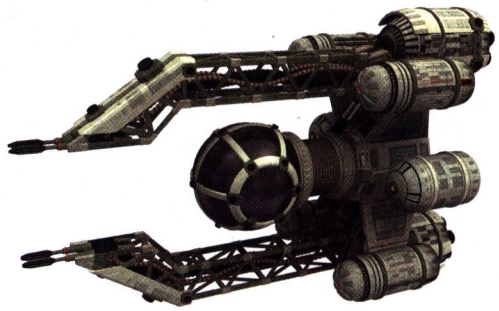
ZSOLT HANULA
LEAD DESIGNER, PHILOS LABS

SEVERAL YEARS ago I was turned onto the whole space strategy genre while sitting in the plush offices of then publishing powerhouse GT Interactive. Several journos had been invited to a presentation of a new game from Hungary (it was standing room only, I tell you) called *Imperium Galactica*. Due mainly to an extremely enthusiastic front man from developers Digital Reality and a classic DFS-based ad-lib from yours truly, the afternoon was an extremely pleasant one for all concerned and I left with great eagerness to try the game out for myself.

Try it out I did, and I became thoroughly enamoured by the mixture

GENESIS







The ships are truly enormous in size and fire power.

"*IG3* Looks set to give the likes of *Homeworld* a run for its money"

CV

PHILOS LABS

Hungary has been experiencing quite a boom in terms of game development this last couple of years...

Jan 1997	Company formed and work begins on *Theocracy*
Feb 2000	*Theocracy* is released to critical acclaim through Ubi Soft
Mar 2000	Work starts on isometric action adventure *Alcatraz* for CDV
Apr 2000	Philos Labs diversifies into educational software with TIM 7
May 2000	Announced as developers of *IG3* at E3
Spring 2002	*Imperium Galactica 3* is scheduled for release

of detailed storyline, space-based strategy and colonial resource management (so much so that for some reason it made me speak like Yoda for a while). The game proved a minor hit, spawned a similarly playable sequel, and then fell into the usual obscurity.

Until suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, it's back, and looks set to give the likes of *Homeworld* and, er, all those other 3D space strategy games a real run for their money. On the face of it everything seems to have changed, not least the developers. Gone are Digital Reality (rumoured to be working on a brand new entry into the rapidly crowding genre) and in their place are fellow Hungarians, Philos Labs.

RHYME AND REASON

Despite the acquisition of the licence, Philos is keen to stress that *IG3* is its own game, not just a rehash of the first two. "Frankly speaking, nothing has been kept from *IG2*," states lead designer Zsolt Hanula boldly. "We've been building everything from the base up. We've learnt that we should not cram too many things into a game, but rather that it's better to concentrate only on one thing, which in our case is the tactical combat system. Imagine a golden mean between *Homeworld* and *Imperium Galactica II* – that is going to be *IG3*," he adds.

One thing that remains is the adherence to a strong plot, and it is this that drives your actions through the game. It was this feature that made the previous titles stand out from the rest of the genre, adding new depth to the usual fare of strategic combat and resource management. To help achieve something similar for this third incarnation, Philos enlisted the help of one of Hungary's leading science fiction authors, Zsolt Nyulászi (Zsolt apparently being the Hungarian equivalent of John or Dave).

The story revolves around a group of refugee humans that fled the Earth when it was taken over by an alien force. While they try to build up enough of a fleet to reclaim their home they'll encounter various alien races, which you are free to make or break alliances with, all of which affects the direction the story heads in.

"It depends on the attitude of the player," says Hanula. "If someone focuses on the missions and the story, then it will be a more linear gameplay, but with plot branches. Those who prefer strategy and empire-building will only experience the game's beginning and end in terms of linearity. Instead of relying on the historic and technical characteristics of the previous two games, *IG3* examines the underlying concept of the series."

LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE

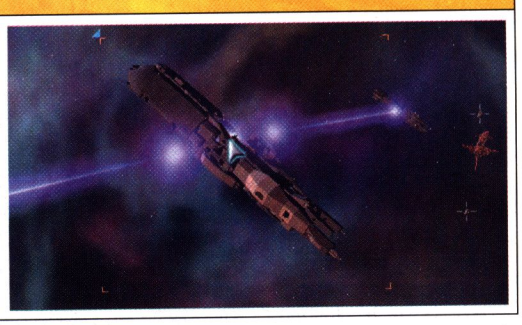
Despite that, one staple concept from the first two games has been done away with

FIRST CONTACT

WILL THIS THIRD OUTING BE A WINNER?

We first saw *Imperium Galactica III* at E3 last year whilst visiting the booth of rising star publisher CDV. It was something of a surprise to see another sequel in the series, since neither of the first two sold particularly well, despite us scoring *IG1* and *IG2* 90 per cent and 85 per cent respectively.

But trust us when we say the game looks gorgeous, certainly better than the current space strategy benchmark *Homeworld* and on the evidence, even more graphically impressive than *Bridge Commander* (reviewed on page 64). Hopefully we'll have a playable demo for you next issue.





Philos is concentrating heavily on *IG3*'s tactical combat system.



No fighting on planet surfaces, but colonisation remains.

almost entirely – ground combat. Part of the uniqueness of the *IG* series was that combat didn't just take place between space-faring behemoths. You could also beef up your planetary colonies with ground units such as tanks and infantry, repelling invasion forces and the like.

"There is no ground combat in the game this time," laments Hanula, "because we've decided to concentrate on the space battles. The ships' weapons could destroy any planetary forces from orbit anyway," he adds, which is a good point. This doesn't mean that planetary units are eliminated entirely. Colonisation is still a key part of the game, ensuring your fleet grows as the game progresses. You just won't be doing any fighting down there, that's all.

Colonies are developed according to the type of path you wish to explore. An emphasis on science over industry will result in newer technologies being developed quicker, at the expense of units to implement them. There's one other aspect to colonies that plays an important part in the long run, namely the development of your citizens. Individual colonists who show outstanding performance may emerge in the long run as individual NPCs with specific abilities and skills, able to be used for special tasks throughout the game.

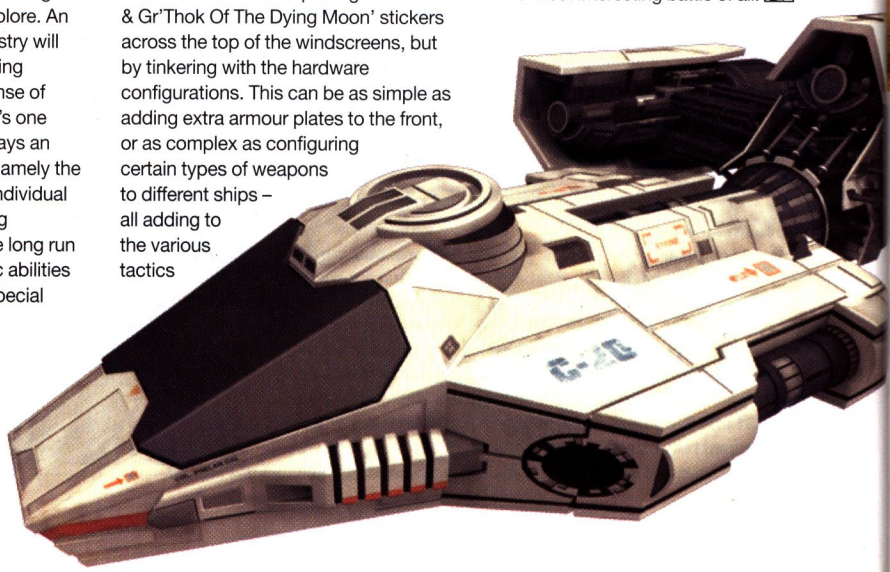
THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

Of course, the main part of the game lies in seeing dozens of tower block-sized spaceships firing different coloured lasers at each other like a kind of twisted Jean-Michel Jarre concert. "You can control up to ten ships simultaneously and during the span of the story you will be able to gain between 20 and 30 altogether," says Hanula.

"Spaceships fire lasers at each other like a kind of twisted Jean-Michel Jarre concert"

The key to these large fleets is that you can customise your ships as you see fit. Not by hanging fuzzy dice on the rear-view monitors or putting 'Sharon & Gr'Thok Of The Dying Moon' stickers across the top of the windscreens, but by tinkering with the hardware configurations. This can be as simple as adding extra armour plates to the front, or as complex as configuring certain types of weapons to different ships – all adding to the various tactics you can use in the middle of the visually stunning battles.

So a bit more depth than the usual strategic fare then. And a story-based approach that gives all the action a sense of purpose. Whether the new boys at Philos can match what went before is something we'll only find out this spring, by which time it'll probably be going up against *Homeworld 2*. Which should be the most interesting battle of all. PCZ



Q&A

ZSOLT HANULA



The lead designer at Philos Labs speaks. We listen. You read. That's how this all works...

PCZ So what was the first game you ever played?
ZH In the middle of the '80s I used to play *Pit Stop 2* a lot on C64. After that came *Elite*, *Pirates*, *Zak McKracken* and the rest.

PCZ What games are you playing at the moment?
ZH I'm playing an old favourite of mine – *Heroes Of Might & Magic III* – it's been on my computer since its release. Other games I've recently got into include the beta of *Magic: The Gathering* online, and *Tekken 3* on the PlayStation.

PCZ How big is the Hungarian games industry?
ZH For a long time Digital Reality was the only significant Hungarian games developer, but in the last few years more and more talented teams have emerged. For example, there's Invictus (*1nsane*), Stormregion, (*S.W.I.N.E.*), Clevers (*Screamer 4x4*), and if I remember correctly, those other developers who are really good, called Philos Labs or something. I think there's quite a lot of us, considering how small our country is.

PCZ What are the most popular types of games in Hungary?
ZH Multiplayer first-person shooters (*Counter-Strike* and *Quake*). RPGs and real-time strategy games are also really popular here – every category has its own fan base.



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THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER 7fx
PUBLISHER Singularity Software
WEBSITE www.7fx.com
OUT April 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Bots, bots, bots and more bots
- RPG character development
- Three team simultaneous play
- Massive maps
- Looks set to challenge *Counter-Strike*

Czech this out, it's...

TEAM FACTOR

***Keith Pullin* gets more than he bargained for while gunrunning in Prague**

"KALISHNIKOV? $3,000 for you. No problem."

It's not what you usually hear after jumping in a cab on your way to a software house, but in Prague they like their guns. In fact, you could say it's the perfect city to develop a shooting game – which is why we're here.

Team Factor, a FPS by first time Czech developer 7fx, has the unenviable position of finding itself up against *Counter-Strike* – a bit like taking on Lennox Lewis in your first professional boxing match.

Still, project supervisor Pavel Sinagl is unfazed and even dismissive of suggestions that challenging the one time *PC ZONE* office favourite is the intention: "*Team Factor* is far more tactical. It may be comparable with *Counter-Strike* in arcade mode, but in realistic mode it's not quite the same game. It's actually offering something quite different."

It's a sensible approach from Mr Sinagl. There's no point in deliberately stepping out in front of a juggernaut like *Counter-Strike*. By deftly stepping aside you can at least shoot out a few tyres and see what happens from there.

SANDWICH SKILLS

7fx has also had the sense to take its time over its first stab at gaming glory. Development began in September 1999; almost ten years to the day after Communism fell in former Czechoslovakia. The programmers believed there were a lot of things missing from FPSs and set about coding their own game from the engine upwards. The afternoon we spent munching curious sandwiches and playing the latest alpha code showed that the Czech spirit of innovation is indeed flying.

TF is trying out a lot of new ideas. A huge part of your success relies upon increasing skills like marksmanship, breath control, stamina, strength, stealth and surveillance to improve your character, which can be either scout, sniper, specialist or soldier. Snipers for example will put everything into their marksmanship or breath control skill. Scouts will probably concentrate on stealth. It's basically up to the player to choose how they want to fine-tune their particular character with the skill points awarded to them.

29 BOTS TO GO

TF also allows three teams containing a maximum of ten players per side to play against each other. Interestingly *TF*'s single-player game is virtually identical to multiplayer. The only difference is that instead of having human players, you have bots in their place. Theoretically, a single-player game can contain 29 bots and one human.



Play with and against up to 29 bots.



Can *Team Factor* make an impact on the team-based FPS market?





Black Hawk down, Black Hawk down.

"*Team Factor* may be comparable with *Counter-Strike*, but it's actually offering something quite different"

But do the bots do the job they're supposed to? Well, from our experience they still need some work but are heading in the right direction. "You can tweak the skill levels of the bots to suit the player, but bots will always be "dumb" explains Pavel. "They might have a superior accuracy setting, meaning they can easily shoot you. But, lets face it, when it comes to real intelligence a human can always outsmart them. But they do learn."

Learning is not just a case of turning the skill level up over time either. These artificial warriors will analyse their surroundings *Terminator* style. Our Czech guide once again provides the detail: "It's quite complex to explain, but players (computer controlled or human) leave invisible traces of information behind them. The bots read this and depending on their intelligence setting will decode and react accordingly. For example, if a bot is set in aggressive mode and hears somebody coming around a corner it might just run in and shoot regardless. If it's not in aggressive mode it might run away and hide itself ready for an ambush."

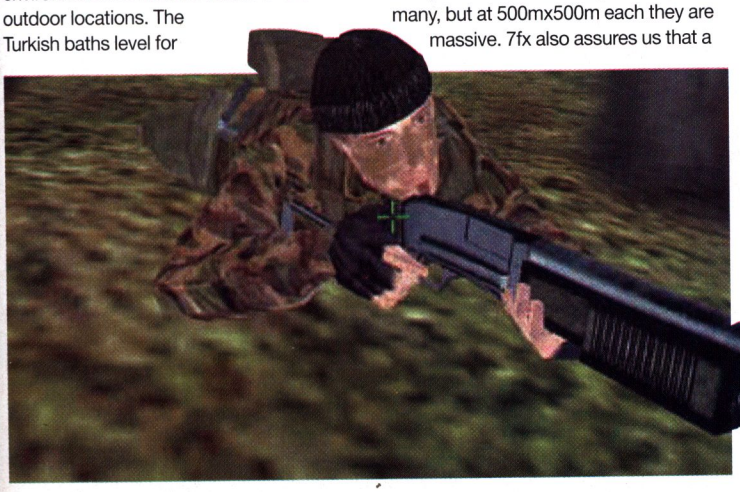
We wait with interest to see how this works in the final version, of course.

BIG FUN

Like *Counter-Strike* the playing environment is a mixture of indoor and outdoor locations. The Turkish baths level for example has some opulent interior design along with some sun-baked exterior locations. One of the jungle missions also hides some underground caves. There are 14 maps in total, which may not seem like many, but at 500mx500m each they are massive. 7fx also assures us that a mod featuring rain and snow plus at least three more maps will be released fairly soon after the game comes out.

The actual mission objectives are straightforward and generally revolve around the fate of some hapless VIP. Typically you'll have one team trying to protect the VIP, another trying to kidnap him and the third trying to kill him.

The emphasis is totally on team play and 'fairplay'. Players are discouraged from repeatedly shooting rookies because they won't be rewarded with as many skill points. In fact, if you keep killing inexperienced players your own skills eventually deteriorate.



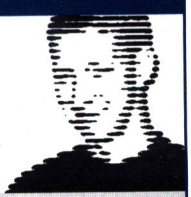
TICK TOCK, TICK TOCK

TF has the potential to challenge the multiplayer big guns, but with an April release looming there's still a lot to do. At the time of writing only one third of the 43 weapons have been implemented and the sound is a bit sparse. Character animation is also something that's yet to be finished, and in the absence of motion-capture technology that could take some time.

But hey, what's the worst that could happen? Even releasing an unfinished game wouldn't be the end of the world. It certainly didn't harm *Hidden & Dangerous*. Never underestimate the power of Czech development – because they will surprise you. PCZ

Q&A

PAVEL SINAGL



Interrogation time for 7fx's project supervisor...

PCZ Do you think Communism delayed or inspired this recent Czech surge of creativity?

PAVEL The communist suppression was terrible, it certainly didn't help us and it took people a long time to recover. But still, there were a lot of Czech developers around before the 1989 revolution. Developing a game is all about talent, ability and ideas as much as resources. I think *Hidden & Dangerous* is an example of the first Czech game that finally made it after a lot of years of trying.

PCZ Do you have a problem getting funding and investors?

PAVEL Not at all. We're not talking about anything excessively expensive – it's just a few PCs. It's more about experience and a willingness to develop a good idea. Look at Spain, they were never renowned for their games and now they've come up with something like *Commandos*.

PCZ Czech developers seem obsessed with guns. Are we ever going to see you develop a cute little platform game?

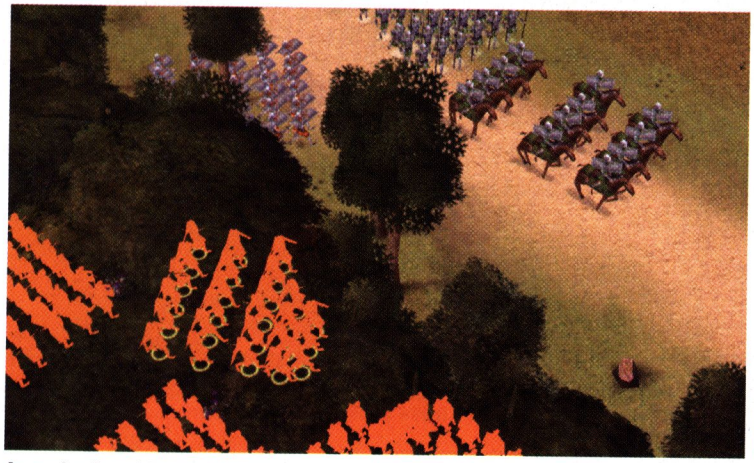
PAVEL Yeah, I don't think we can stick to guns and war forever. I think that's the next step for Czech-based studios.

PCZ Have you ever been in a gunfight before?

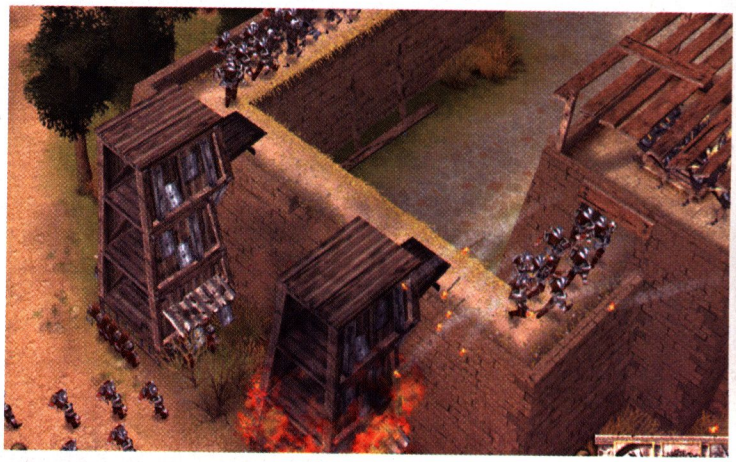
PAVEL No, never a gunfight or knife fight. Fortunately I have never been in such a situation.

PRAETORIANS

Friends, Britons, *PC ZONE* readers, lend *Richie Shoemaker* your ears



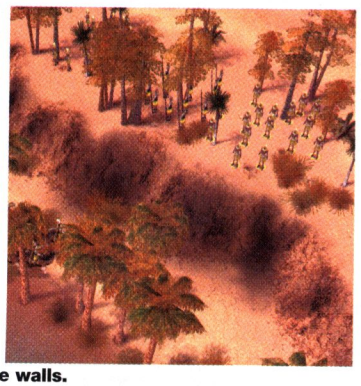
An ambush waiting to happen





Snowball fight anyone?





Use siege towers and ladders to scale the walls.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Pyro Studios
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE www.pyrostudios.com
OUT Autumn 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's by the Spanish studio behind the *Commandos* series
- *Shogun*-style real-time strategy, without the resource management
- Gorgeous 3D maps and wonderfully animated units
- Impressive siege battles

NOW THAT the big guns of real-time strategy – Westwood and Ensemble Studios, responsible for *C&C* and *Age Of Empires* respectively – have both embraced 3D graphics, can we now proclaim the sprite-based 2D graphics engine dead? I for one sincerely hope not, but you have to admit, we haven't seen a killer isometric game for some time, despite the unending popularity of sprite-based graphics in games like *The Sims*. Never fear, say I, *Praetorians* is almost here.

"Hang on there Shoemaker," you interject, "If you look closely you'll see *Praetorians* is actually a 3D game." Oh, and you can tell, can you? "Oh yes," I hear you say, "look at the little men running around, they seem to be made up of straight lines, suggesting they are thoughtfully constructed out of hundreds of thousands of little computer generated triangle-shaped sticklebricks." Well... yes, that does seem to be the case. "Ergo, Mr Maker of Shoes, 3D!"

3D OR NOT 3D...?

Well, yes and no. While *Praetorians* looks utterly 3D and indeed is, it doesn't actually play in 3D. For instance you can't spin the camera, nor can you zoom in or out on the countless dozens of troops. In fact, like *C&C*, you're stuck with the same view – except of course that your legions of Romans, Egyptians or Barbarians, move about as naturally as they might in the most realistic first-person shooter. It's a curious thing to actually create a stunning-looking 3D game and not allow those that play it to swoop through it like an uncle at a wedding wielding a new camcorder. Why so?

"We wanted the game to feel familiar to people," says Iñigo Vinós of Pyro Studios. "Which is why we have a fixed perspective. Because of the engine, however, we can zoom in for cut-scenes and show the individual faces on the characters, which will drive the story forward."

The storyline is important, in that although the campaign is a linear one, you play throughout the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, controlling each of the game's three races in turn. Moreover, the battles themselves are based on real events, one for instance has you guiding a small Roman detachment through the mountains to outflank a barbarian army – perhaps the first ever documented use of Special Forces behind enemy lines.

SKILLED LABOUR

Rather than dragging boxes around your troops, *Praetorians*' troops are pre-grouped, *Shogun*-style, with you being able to split formations up as and when you see fit. Of course there are the usual gamut of soldiers, from those on horse and camel, to archers and infantry, but rather than employ the tired paper-scissors-stone formula, each unit has a sting in the tail, a secondary skill if you will. For example, Roman heavy infantry can form into the famous tortoise formation and use javelins as short-ranged weapons. There are some highly original units as well; rather than have scouts, armies can employ men with hawks on their arms that can be launched skywards to seek out the enemy. Then there are the commanders that can recruit and train soldiers from local villages under your control. Best of all you can use engineers to push huge siege towers into place, drive battering rams into city gates or storm the walls with ladders. Watching the game in action it has to be said it is a wonderfully animated game, easily on a par with the recent *Battle Realms*. If the game underneath ends up being half as good as the graphics, we are in for a real treat indeed. PCZ

"We can zoom in for cut-scenes and show the individual faces on the characters"
IÑIGO VINÓS
PYRO STUDIOS



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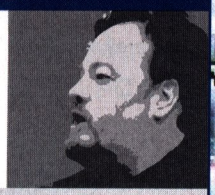
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PROFILE

BILL ROPER



DEVELOPER: Blizzard

POSITION: Senior Producer

FAVOURITE GAME: *Ultima VII*, it had everthing going for it.

FIRST GAME YOU EVER PLAYED: The old Xs and Os *Star Trek* game at the Livermore Labs at Berkeley University.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Blizzard
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.blizzard.com/war3
OUT May

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Game balancing – Blizzard is the master at this
- Classic-style RTS with a dash of RPG
- Choose from four different races
- Sure to be an online hit



The game is almost ready apparently, although extensive balancing is taking place before release.

Oi!... ROPER, what's your game?

WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS

Can Blizzard have more success with its 3D RTS than Westwood did with *Emperor: Battle For Dune*? *Rhianna Pratchett* is waiting for a sign



Now in 3D, the *Warcraft* series is bang up to date.

"We definitely realise that 3D strategy games have yet to hit their stride"

BILL ROPER
SENIOR PRODUCER, BLIZZARD

PLAYING *Warcraft* or *Warcraft II* is just something you do as a gamer. It's the gaming equivalent of going through puberty, with the pubic hair, bodily swellings and fascination with the opposite sex replaced with chubby humans, monosyllabic orcs and the first stirrings of strategic ecstasy. Now seven years later we're due to revisit the lands of Azeroth, as it's Blizzard's turn to dip its toe into the murky depths of 3D strategy with *Warcraft III: Reign Of Chaos*. Will they walk on water or plummet to the bottom of a urine-stained swimming pool like the fat kid in school? Senior producer Bill Roper puts on his swimming trunks.

PCZ *Warcraft III* has changed since it was first announced, particularly the 3D view. Why have you had to make these changes and what effect has this had on the development of the game?
BILL The biggest thing we did was to change the camera angle. The idea was always to make a strategy game, and when we first tried out the camera angles, we really liked the different look that it gave us. Unfortunately we found it made it incredibly difficult to build up controlled strategy and attacks, although it has become the genesis for the camera angle design for *World Of Warcraft*. All the other elements – characters going up levels, having inventories, gaining skills and spells and an interactive environment – are still the focus of *Warcraft III*.

PCZ As one of the 'big three' RTS studios, how much pressure is on you to come up with the goods with your first full 3D title?
BILL We definitely realise that 3D strategy games have yet to hit their stride. I think that one of the reasons for that, and one thing that we're really addressing is that 3D technology should aid you in making a good strategy game, but shouldn't be the be-all and end-all of the game. Just because you're making something in 3D doesn't mean you have to do everything that 3D does. We decided to use 3D for the things we thought it could be really good for – giving us some great terrain and effects for gameplay, looks, characters and spells. Basically we can get a lot of things out of 3D without relying too heavily on it. I think it's an issue that a lot of games have come up against, that they do things because they can, not because they should.



As with all of Blizzard's games *Warcraft III* will be playable online at Battle.net.

PCZ How different is it from 2D/isometric development?
BILL I think similarities just come from gameplay mechanics and what makes it fun. You can really use the 3D engine to introduce different elements, like true line of sight, or day/night cycling, making it a key part of gameplay. With the 3D game, even though we've gone with a kind of isometric view, it still allows us to do a lot of different things with the camera and the terrain effects.

PCZ *Starcraft* and *Warcraft II* are still incredibly popular games. What is it about the Blizzard games that makes them age so well?
BILL We've managed to be very fortunate and have our games remain quite popular long after release. There are two key elements that come to mind. One is that the games are very, very simple to get into, but then we try and build a long-term difficulty curve so they take a while to master. We still see tactics that we haven't ever seen before come out of Korea with *Starcraft*, where they are very competitive in their play. I think the second element is that we continue to provide a lot of support for our games long after they ship – for example, we just released a patch for *Starcraft*. We have always tried to pay attention to our gamers and their needs and desires. We really want to make it something that is a community.

PCZ Blizzard has always been known for the fine balancing in all of its games. Is this something you are particularly conscious of?
BILL Well, balance is incredibly important to us. I think a good example of that right now is the battle.net beta we're doing for *Warcraft III*. We're trying to get a lot of people playing the game and seeing what they find works or doesn't work, so we can balance the races. We always leave ourselves a long time to do that.

PCZ Is it something that comes easier to you now, or is it always hard?
BILL A good balance is always hard to do, because it is so demanding. It's so much work to ensure that the game you're making has that level of quality, not only in the game and the production values, but in the fact you're going to have people of very disparate abilities play the game and you want to make sure it's accessible, fun and a viable gameplay experience for players of as many skill levels as possible.

PCZ What do you think is the most important aspect of a game?
BILL I think the most important aspect of any game, and this sounds almost simplistic, is that it's fun. I think people get enamoured with technology and with some radical new idea about how they are going to go about some element of the gameplay, and that becomes their key focus, rather than making a game that is really enjoyable. Something like the *Diablo* series doesn't do this. There's nothing complex about the gameplay model – it's the kill and reward, it has a lotto or slot machine aspect and that's the fun element of it and everything else supports that model.

"We look upon a deep storyline as something we can bring to the strategy genre"
BILL ROPER
SENIOR PRODUCER, BLIZZARD

PCZ What was the one thing you saw and personally thought: 'Hey that actually looks really cool, I love it'?
BILL The first time we got the terrain working right. There was still a while there where the game felt very flat and we really needed to use the 3D engine to make the terrain look more realistic. The art team and the level design team took a couple of weeks and worked on one map which had nice rolling hills, plateaus and peaks. It went suddenly from being a gameboard to being this lush landscape. It was becoming a real little world.



The Undead and Night Elves are the two new *Warcraft* races.



Legendary heroes add an RPG flavour to the game.

PCZ Without beating around the bush, *Starcraft* in 3D – how likely?
BILL If we do a *Starcraft II* it would definitely be in 3D because I don't imagine we're going to go back to 2D at this point. We love the *Starcraft* universe, and we have every intention of going back and revisiting it. The challenge for us is much like *Warcraft III*, in that it's so difficult for us to support all our franchises. We're still a relatively small company with a limited amount of development teams. There has been a lot of clamouring to do *Starcraft II* from our fans, but the development team really wanted to go back to the *Warcraft* universe. We're faced with almost an embarrassment of riches; we have three great licences and only so many people to make games with them.

PCZ How much is there left to do on *Warcraft III* and how difficult will the final stages be?
BILL Balance is definitely one of the big ones, which is why we're happy to be in beta right now and get the games going. We're also doing a lot of work on the single-player campaign, which is still incredibly important. We really wanted to tell an amazing story with *Warcraft III* in the same way that we did with *Starcraft*. We look upon a deep, complex, interesting storyline as being something we can bring to the strategy genre, that I think often gets left out.

CV

BLIZZARD

The company that has sold more games than Vanessa Feltz has had hot dinners is readying itself for another healthy injection of cash with the release of *Warcraft III*

1995 *Warcraft: Orcs And Humans* Both a quick seller and a classic, this first *Warcraft* title paved the way for a whole host of fantasy RTS titles.

1995 *Warcraft II: Tides Of Darkness* Blizzard quickly capitalised on our lust for human versus orc action and brought out a second and considerably superior title.

1997 *Diablo* This isometric hack 'n' slash encapsulated Blizzard's unspoken mantra of simple yet addictive gameplay.

1998 *Starcraft* The prime examples of sheer RTS longevity, *Starcraft* took the essence of *Warcraft* and gave it a huge boost in terms of graphics and gameplay and became a worldwide hit.

2001 *Diablo II* With considerably better gameplay and longevity than its older brother, this is still one of the most popular online RPGs.

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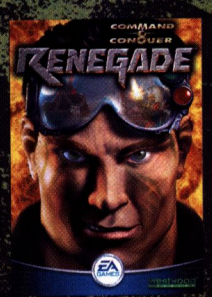
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INFILTRATE THE NOD BASE AND ASSASSINATE YOUR FOE



BLAST THROUGH FIREFIGHTS AND GRAB SOME INTEL



USE YOUR MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

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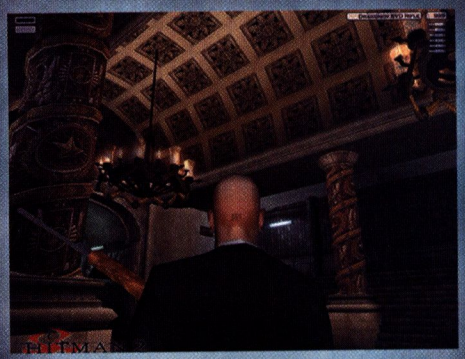
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MARCH 2002









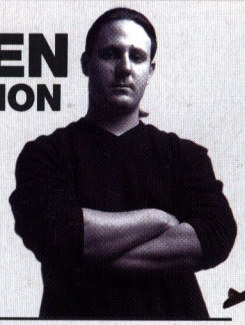
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REVIEWS

ALIEN INVASION



■ **REVIEWS EDITOR** Martin Korda

Those of you who braved this column last issue will be aware of the irony of my girlie swot-like enthusiasm for the games we were promised for review. From the list of ten, I've been growing increasingly more demoralised as five of them have dropped out. Still, five out of ten isn't too bad, and seeing as this industry is about as punctual as a doped-up sociology student, perhaps we should be thankful for our lot.

So what delectable delights of gaming excellence have we on offer this issue? Or rather, what actually made it into the issue (for the more cynical among you who can see straight through my thinly disguised hyperbole)? Right, first off is *Dungeon Siege* (p58). We locked Chris Anderson in a room with a PC, the game and 372,000 extra-strong Marlboros for a week, never once hearing a peep out of him. Want to know what he thought once he emerged from his smoke den? Well you've got the page number, so use your initiative.

Stupid Vulcan hand signs at the ready, we have an unexpected arrival. It's *Star Trek: Bridge Commander*. In my incredibly finite wisdom I failed to foresee this one last month, but come the hour Richie was more than ready and spent the best part of a week barking instructions at his motley crew.

Then there's *Warrior Kings*, which finally arrived after having had us panting with anticipation for almost two years – and it's had me killing things in its beautiful 3D landscapes ever since. Next up is *Virtua Tennis*. Can it live up to its Dreamcast counterpart? Find out from resident cynic Steve Hill, and check out what he's got to say on another console-inspired game, *Star Wars: Starfighter*. Rounding off the A-list is *Global Ops*.

My predictions for next month? We're all going to die a hideous death by an invading alien race. Well let's face it, it's about as likely as a game being released on time.



Has *Dungeon Siege* lived up to expectations?





THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly game publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic. Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

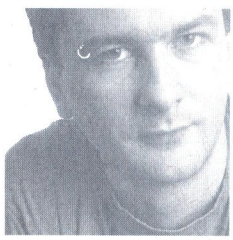
OUR REVIEWERS

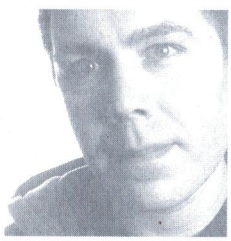
We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means that you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Rhianna loose on *FIFA 2003*. We know that occasionally you might disagree with us but we're big enough to take criticism. You can email your thoughts to letters@pczone.co.uk, or get them off your chest instantly on the forums at www.pczone.co.uk. If you think you can do better then why not send us a review – if it's good enough we'll print it in the magazine.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND REVIEW UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale, and if there are no public servers running before we go to print we won't second guess how the game's going to play online. Instead you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Update section. This is also the place where we take a fresh look at games we think have changed significantly – as is the case with persistent online games or through major patch releases.

MEET THE TEAM

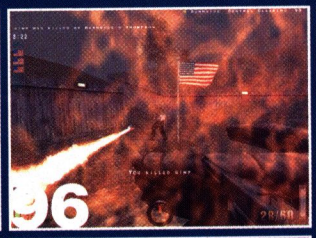




	DAVE WOODS	RICHIE SHOEMAKER
What are you playing?	*Ghost Recon: Desert Siege*	*Laser Squad Nemesis*
What's the best RPG you've ever played and why?	*Planescape: Torment*, but to be honest I'm a clean-shaven sort of bloke	*Elite*'s an RPG as far as I'm concerned, so I'll go for that



RE-RELEASES
Flashpoint makes a comeback



UPDATES
Patches and multiplayer reviews



SUPERTEST
What's the best shooter in town?

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

58 **DUNGEON SIEGE**

64 **STAR TREK: BRIDGE COMMANDER**

68 **GLOBAL OPS**

70 **WORMS BLAST**

72 **DISCIPLES II: DARK PROPHECY**

75 **VIRTUA TENNIS**

76 **STAR WARS: STAR FIGHTER**

78 **EUROPA UNIVERSALIS II**

80 **WARRIOR KINGS**

85 **DARKSPACE**

86 **LASER SQUAD NEMESIS**

88 **HITCHCOCK: THE FINAL CUT**

88 **TROPICO: PARADISE ISLAND**

89 **SOLARIS 1.0.4.**

89 **DIG DUG DEEPER**

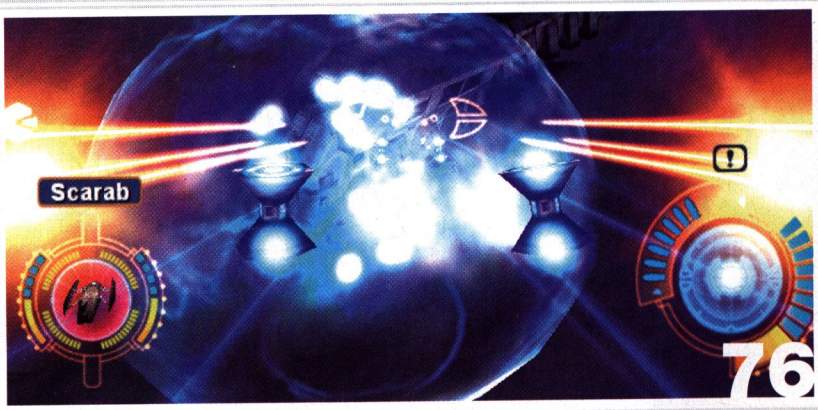
90 **CAPITALISM II**

90 **DEMON WORLD II**

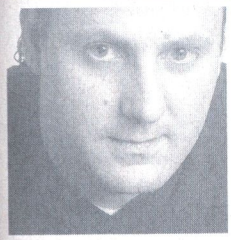
91 **TRAINZ**

91 **HALCYON SUN**





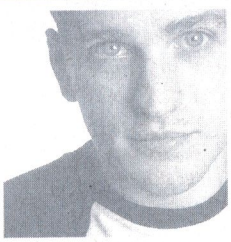




MARTIN KORDA

Warrior Kings

Life. It's the best RPG you'll ever play – if you can be bothered to take part



ANTHONY HOLDEN

Laser Squad: Nemesis and *Max Payne*

Final Fantasy VII. It brings tears to my eyes just thinking about it… sob



RHIANNA PRATCHETT

Diablo II: Lord Of Destruction on Battle.net

Thief II. Because it's totally immersive and the AI is great – even now



MARK HILL

Championship Manager Season 01/02

Deus Ex, but *Planescape: Torment* comes a close second



STEVE HILL

Sky Sports Football Manager

I've played *EverQuest* for cash. That's the only one I've played



CHRIS ANDERSON

Dungeon Siege and *EverQuest*

Baldur's Gate 2 and *Planescape: Torment*. Masterful storytelling and great humour

DUNGEON SIEGE

■ £34.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Gas Powered Games | ETA: April 17 | Web: www.dungeonsiege.com

REQUIRES PIII 333, 128Mb RAM 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 500, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card

It's not often we come across a game that throws the technology rulebook out of the window and breaks new ground. *Dungeon Siege*, as *Chris Anderson* has discovered, does exactly that

SIT DOWN A WHILE and think about what you would really like to see in a computer role-playing title if you were designing your own game. Think about all the games you have played that made you think 'if only they had done it this way' and think about all the times you've cursed a user interface that appeared to be designed to hinder your progress in every way possible rather than making the game easier to play. Just about every new RPG that comes along supposedly having learned from the mistakes of its competition has flaws in character management, inventory handling, camera placement, you name it, they know how to break it.

All of this is about to change. *Dungeon Siege* is a classic example of how to make a game which helps the player at every turn instead of making the most simple things frustratingly difficult. It is no exaggeration to say the user interface is a masterpiece of design in itself. Picture the scene: you have a party of four characters who spend their time exploring a new land and killing things in the face as they go along (in time-honoured RPG tradition), and of course, looting the corpses of everything they kill. As always, before you know it you have more stuff than you know what to do with. You want to know what all this stuff is, you want to know what it does and which members of your party can use it, and you want to know now. *Dungeon Siege* addresses the problem thus: select your party members with a hotkey, and press 'i'. Each party member's inventory screen appears showing everything they have in their possession, and their base statistics. Highlight an item and you can see immediately who can use it and who can't, and how much damage it does, and which skills you need to improve before your characters can use it. Exchanging items between characters is as simple as dragging them from one inventory window to another. Even looting all the corpses after a battle is a simple matter of pressing the 'z' key at which point your party members will automatically loot all the gold and items in the immediate area without you having to painstakingly pick up every item and find a character with enough space to hold it. It's a work of art I tell you, and you can be pretty damned sure that every RPG that comes along after this one will be judged, in terms of interface design at least, by the awesome standards set by *Dungeon Siege*. This is all the more convenient since *Dungeon Siege* is all about one thing and one thing only: non-stop action.





KNOW YOUR ENEMY

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR YOUR PARTY?

There are many different types of enemies in the world of *Dungeon Siege*, and some of them hit a lot harder than others. Here are a few we came across along the way.



One of the more visually impressive beasties, mine worms fight alone but can take some beating without heavy damage spells.



A great example of the imaginative enemy design in *Dungeon Siege*, the Horrid is one of those monsters you zoom in on to get a closer look.



A frost drake has a lot of hitpoints but very little sense so despatching them quickly is no great task.





As you get into the game the visuals are stunning.

THE FUN NEVER STOPS

It's worth pointing out right now that *Dungeon Siege* is by no stretch of the imagination a ponderous, relaxed RPG like many of you will no doubt be accustomed to. Combat is relentless, even at the beginning when you start with just one character in your party the enemies never stop coming. They are all over the place. You start the game in farmland and can't even move outside without tons of things trying to make a huge dent in your health bar. This is a little daunting at first, as you can't so much as take in your surroundings without being leapt upon by creatures of all types and sizes, but once you get used to the pace of the game, combat is fairly easy to get through, and later in the game when you have a full party of characters you can prepare for any eventuality with the use of effective formations, and by assigning your characters to specific roles during battle. However, combat could have been nigh on impossible to deal with if it were not for the excellent 3D camera which lets you control the action from literally any angle you choose. Moving your mouse left and right or up and down rotates and tilts the camera view so you can always see what's going on very easily. Along with the excellent interface, the 3D camera is another innovation which will set standards that we expect will be difficult to beat, and we can confidently say it's the first game of this type that we've seen which uses a 3D camera that helps players instead of confusing them. You constantly get the feeling that Gas Powered Games has taken a long hard look at the competition thus far and thrown all previous examples of 3D in-game technology in the bin and instead designed their own engine from the ground up, and it's as impressive to observe as it is effective in combat. A zoom feature enables you to get a close-up view of the action at any time, and while this won't particularly help you in battle, you will find yourself using it often just to get a better look at some of the most detailed and impressive character and monster designs ever seen in a game of this type. The visuals in *Dungeon Siege* are breathtaking in places, and always impressive no matter where you are in the game, be it inside a new town or traversing a new dungeon or outdoor area, the level of detail is staggering. It has to be said though, that standing about taking in the beautiful surroundings can often



STORY BORED

IS *DUNGEON SIEGE* LOSING THE PLOT?

Dungeon Siege's ongoing storyline involves nasty behaviour from the Krugs which you obviously need to get to the bottom of since they're killing everything in sight. While the intro sets the scene nicely, the rest of the game fails to capitalise on this and non-player character interaction is as minimalist as it could possibly be. There are very few NPCs who are put in place purely to drag you into the storyline or act as plot devices, and you will most likely forget completely what the plot is until you reach a new game chapter and you are reminded with a small paragraph from an NPC that something bad is going on. Lack of story development is the only genuinely bad thing about an otherwise very polished game.



The game features too few NPCs.



prove disastrous, with countless hordes intent on ending your virtual existence. You can, however, make life a lot easier for yourself in the face of such overwhelming opposition, through another of *Dungeon Siege*'s innovative features: flexible character development.

WIZARDS, WARRIORS... WHO NEEDS 'EM?

Dungeon Siege does not feature standard RPG class types such as wizards, rogues etc, instead it encourages you to develop your characters in any way you see fit. Each character has four skills available to them: melee, ranged combat, and two schools of magic – combat and nature. The more you use a skill, the more experience you gain in this particular skill, and repeated use of the same skill will bring your characters up in level. For example, a character that always uses melee weapons will go up in melee skill and his levels will be raised accordingly in this type of combat. You can switch between the skills at any time, so it's possible to have a character who's mediocre in all four skills and doesn't excel in any one department, but it makes a lot more sense to focus your character's skills on one area. Using a party of four, we developed two very strong melee types to stand up front and take a beating, with a combat mage at the back raining down a heavy area of effect spells, and another character skilled in range combat striking from a distance and doubling up as a healer through the use of nature magic. Formations help a lot in these situations (it's always wise to keep your healer and magic user at the back) and you can choose from one of many formations simply by right clicking the mouse and moving it till you find the shape you want your party to stand in. This emphasises the constant attention to user friendliness which is prevalent throughout the game. Another advantage of this method of character development is that all the spells and weapons and items are available to all your characters providing they meet the base requirement for the spell or item in question. For example, it's not possible to wear certain armour types unless your strength rating is high enough, and many spells cannot be cast unless your combat or nature magic rating is sufficient, but you can 'train' any character in another skillset very quickly if you wish to change their role in the party.

If combat gets too hectic, press the space bar to pause the action.



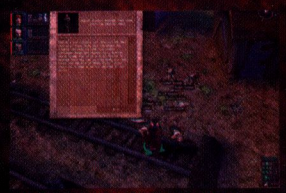
Upgrading armour and items is simplicity itself. Select a character and you can see immediately which items they can use from the shop and which they can't.

STATS? YOU CAN KEEP THEM TOO...

Dungeon Siege's unique method of character improvement negates the need for the myriad



We have no clue what this thing is, but it doesn't seem to like us very much.

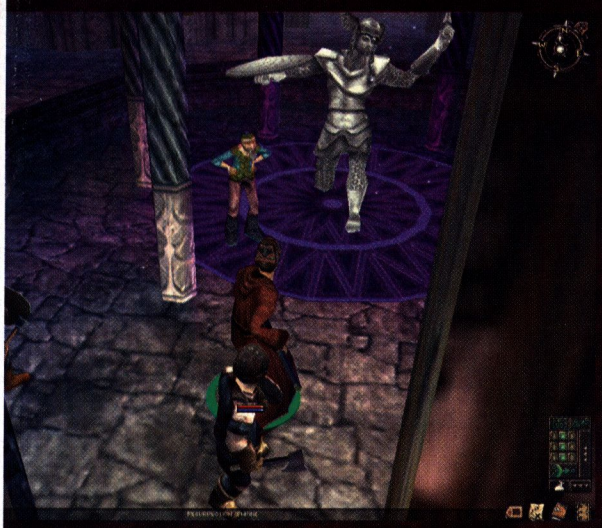


NPCs may give you quests. They're worth doing, if only to advance your character.





As usual, it all kicks off in the corner just as you've killed all the monsters in the room.





Stand and fight on a mana shrine and you can cast spells to your heart's content.

YES, YOU CAN HAVE IT ALL

A DONKEY'S LIFE IS NEVER EASY

You surely must have played many role-playing titles where you had to leave behind most of the good loot you find in dungeons because your party simply couldn't carry it all. *Dungeon Siege* introduces the concept of pack mules to get around this problem. Buy one of these handy beasts and you can store everything you find on your travels and then sell it when you get to the next town or merchant. You are advised to buy one of these creatures as soon as you can.

While decent armour and most items can be found through killing things and taking what they drop, higher level spells, and new party members can not. You will meet new characters as you progress through the game who will join your party, but their services are by no means cheap, so don't leave home without your pack mule or you'll find the money you get from what you sell at each town will not cover your costs by a long shot.



IT'S MAGIC

THE WAY FORWARD FOR RPG SPELL SYSTEMS

Dungeon Siege employs a magic system which is as clever and easy to use as the rest of the games' impressive interface features. There are two schools of magic: combat and nature, and you can find spells by killing enemies or buying them at shops throughout the game. The real beauty of the magic system is you can equip any spell you find, even if you can't use it, and freely distribute spells between any character, or even sell them if you find you no longer have a use for them.

This is another one of *Dungeon Siege*'s 'why didn't anyone else think of that?' features which makes the game such a joy to play. No more wading through spell books cluttered with spells you don't want or need, you equip only the spells you want to use, and similarly, get rid of the ones you no longer need. This is a great idea in theory, and even better in practice. If any developers out there are in the midst of designing a new RPG, they would do well to take note of this feature.



of statistics you will see in most role-playing games. There is no need for a long list of statistics going into meticulous detail for each character, since you can see very clearly at a glance where your strengths and weaknesses are for each party member and improve them accordingly if necessary. This may alienate those of you who like nothing better than to sit for hours staring at long reams of statistics and trying to work out what the hell they all mean and what benefit you will get by tweaking them (or what you will cock up if it all goes horribly wrong), but spend a little time experimenting with different combinations of skillsets and you will soon see that all the tools you need to fine-tune your characters are right there at your fingertips.

It all makes for a very fast-paced, no-nonsense, no-holds barred action-packed RPG. This was the goal of Gas Powered Games when it set out to make *Dungeon Siege*, and it has certainly achieved it. But for all its innovation and superb presentation, when all is said and done it's just another RPG, albeit a very polished one, and for this reason it's not Classic material. *Dungeon Siege*'s remarkable innovations all relate to game interface and design as opposed to the gameplay itself which doesn't stray far from standard RPG action-based shenanigans. This in itself is nothing to scoff at, if you've ever dreamed of playing *Diablo II* in full 3D with vastly improved graphics and presentation, you will find *Dungeon Siege* an absolute joy to play. You will want to get to the end of the game just for the immense satisfaction of exploring the beautiful game-world and discovering new spells and items as you go, both of which are plentiful and varied. In summary then, *Dungeon Siege* is a technological triumph and one of the most enjoyable games we have played in a long time, and if you like your RPGs to place more emphasis on action and combat than stats, there is currently no better choice on the market. PCZ





A typical scene in *Dungeon Siege*: four of you and a million of them.



Oooh, just take a look at all the pretty colours!

"You will want to get to the end just for the immense satisfaction of exploring the beautiful gameworld"

INPERSPECTIVE

DIABLO II
Reviewed Issue 93
Diablo II has all the action of *Dungeon Siege* with none of the polish, which is no real surprise since it's basically a minimal upgrade on *Diablo I*.

BALDUR'S GATE 2
Reviewed Issue 96
If you find the action in *Dungeon Siege* a bit too fast and furious, or you miss the old-skool heavy stats of conventional RPGs, or you just want to play an amazing game in its own right, *Baldur's Gate 2* is currently one of the best fantasy-based RPG on PC.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Revolutionary interface design
- ✔ Spectacular graphics and character models
- ✔ Flexible character development
- ✘ Uninspiring storyline
- ✘ Constant hack and slash can get repetitive in later chapters
- ✘ Minimal interaction with non-player characters

89

Flawless presentation and relentless action. *Diablo* begone

TACTICAL REAL TIME STRATEGY

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Often there'll be other Federation Ships to help out if you find yourself in a tricky situation.

STAR TREK: BRIDGE COMMANDER

■ £29.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Totally Games | ETA: Out Now | Web: www.bridgecommander.com

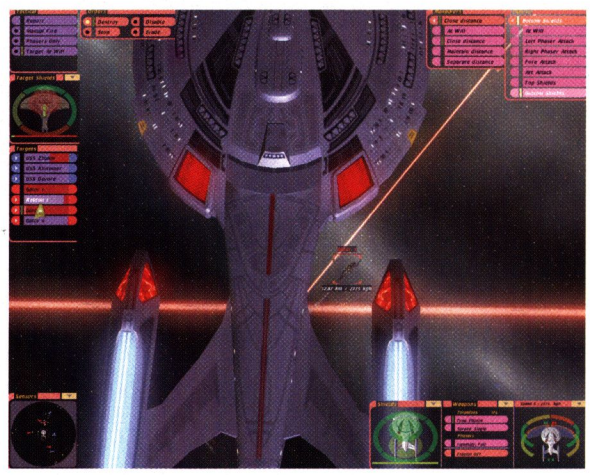
REQUIRES PII 300, 64Mb RAM plus a 16Mb 3D graphics card **DESIRES** PII 450, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb graphics card

***Richie Shoemaker* goes into a bar all hailing frequencies open**



YOU NEVER know quite where you are with humans, do you? Accidentally bump into one in a pub and whether you spill their pint or not, you can't ever really tell what might happen, despite how close together their eyes or how pendulous their earlobes. Will they turn and put a friendly arm around you and embrace you as a long-lost brother, or will you be bundled onto the street to fight for your honour? Tricky beasts, humans.

If it were a bar on *Deep Space Nine* the problem would be much easier to circumvent. Spill a drop of your neighbour's synthehol and all it takes is a quick glance at their facial features to plan your next move. Does he have engorged eyebrow ridges and giant ears? If so you've chanced across a Ferengi and they'll probably demand a few bars of latinum in compensation, to which you just yank their lobes in a forceful manner and continue the evening (very sensitive part of the Ferengi anatomy, the ears). If they have cratered grey skin covered in bony nodules, then they'll probably back off with a smile and stab you in the back when you go for a wee-wee. That's the Cardissians for you. Cornish pasty on forehead means you've just insulted an entire Klingon bloodline, so prepare for lengthy name-calling, followed by fisticuffs and marriage to his sister. Or if they are a Bajoran, where the skin between the eyes looks like it's been pinched by a pair of pliers, you can just ignore them. The only non-human beings worth worrying about are the Borg, with their telling red beams of light scanning the room, in which case I would advise rotating your shield harmonics and making for a starship, preferably the Enterprise, since it always manages to scrape through the most dire of circumstances.



The target lock camera is perfectly implemented.

YOUNG ENTERPRISE

Funnily enough the USS Enterprise is where you begin your adventure in *Bridge Commander*, or rather the captain of *Star Trek*'s most famous ship begins the game on your bridge, that of the USS Dauntless. Having lost your previous captain in an explosion in the Vesuvi system, you've been promoted to your first command and Picard is on hand to teach you the ropes while you in turn ferry him off to meet some Klingons. Needless to say that at some point, very soon after

IN PERSPECTIVE

INDEPENDENCE WAR 2: EDGE OF CHAOS
Reviewed Issue 104
Open-ended, incredible graphics and a rich story, even if it's a little slow to get going

BATTLECRUISER MILLENNIUM
Reviewed Issue 112
Hardcore space simulation covering everything from first-person combat to strategy. Ugly, infuriating but utterly exhaustive.

KLINGON ACADEMY
Reviewed Issue 93
Entertaining combat game, despite the over-complicated interface and detached flight dynamics. *Bridge Commander* has shown us the way.



"Sir, may I suggest you put your trousers back on."

Picard is dropped off in actual fact, the universe needs to be saved and it's you rather than he that will have to do the saving, which is probably something of a relief for the man.

And so the real game begins, as *Star Trek* often does, with a series of mysterious attacks on a variety of ships, this time within and around a temperamental area of vacuum called the Maelstrom, which as it happens, the Vesuvi system is a part of. Your task then is to find out who is doing the attacking, why, and what the Vesuvi explosion has got to do with it. It's effectively the sci-fi equivalent of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, with you and your ship in turn asking who out of the Cardassians, Klingons and Romulans have been eating the porridge, and just like back at the bar at *Deep Space Nine*, it doesn't take a genius to guess who's behind the kerfuffle.

"The ships look the part, especially in terms of scale as you manoeuvre out of a starbase"

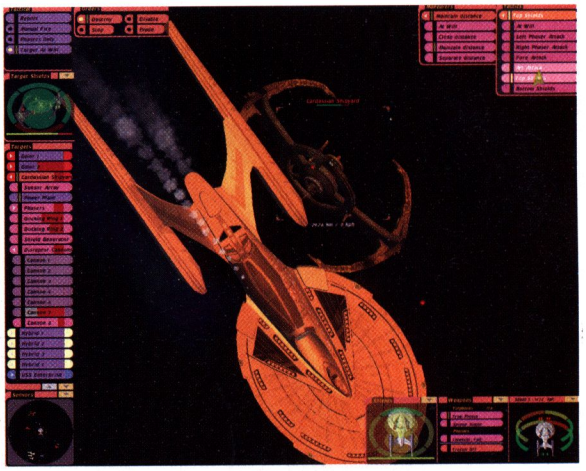
CHAINED BY COMMAND

Before reaping equal amounts of praise and vitriol on the game proper, let's just say that while the story is perfectly acceptable *Star Trek* fare, the part you play in uncovering the predictable truth is so un-*Star Trek* that *Bridge Commander* might as well not be a *Star Trek* game at all. Effectively all you are doing is warping in to system after system, occasionally scanning the odd planet and usually blowing away all the ships you come across into dust. There would be nothing wrong with that if this was *Wing Commander*, *Freespace*, or indeed *Star Wars*, but being a *Star Trek* game it feels wrong that you never get the chance to bend a few rules and take matters into your own hands from time to time. Of course, the natural chain of command dictates that you follow orders and in turn your crew follow yours, but how many *Star Trek* captains do you know who follow every order to the letter? Answer: only the boring ones that no-one remembers.

What *Bridge Commander* needs are a few choices in the game; some opportunities to take short cuts, use some initiative, take a few risks or even disregard orders altogether if it means there is a chance of greater success further down the road. As it is, the game feels far too structured in that there is rarely more than one option open to you – which as I say is fine for a combat game, which this primarily is, but for that *Star Trek* dimension needs something extra – freedom to make decisions of your own outside the sphere of combat.

WHEN SPARKS FLY

The game is excessively linear but paradoxically because of



Attacking stations is very easy.



Cheer up, it's only a blown fuse.



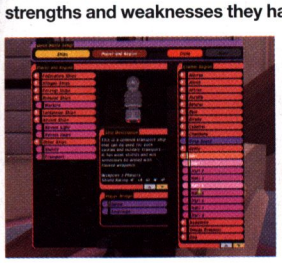
Notice the warp trails?

ENEMY KNOWN

THE WHO'S WHO OF STAR TREK SPACE COMBAT

A *Star Trek* game where you only get to command two ships would be a bit limited. Thankfully, by selecting to play a Quick Battle, you can take charge of any ship in the game and pit your wits against the computer across any of the systems in the main campaign. Not only is it an effective way to try out strategies for later on in the missions, but you can take command of non-Federation ships to see what strengths and weaknesses they have. Fancy taking on eight Akira-class battleships in a shuttle? Well you can do that here, or pit any combination of Romulan, Cardassian, Kessok or Federation ships against each other.

Multiplayer games work in much the same way, except of course rather than one-on-one or team games against bots, you can have eight-way deathmatches (four-way for 56K modem users), team deathmatches or play Defend the Starbase. We'll let you know what it's like online next issue.









Star Trekking across the universe...

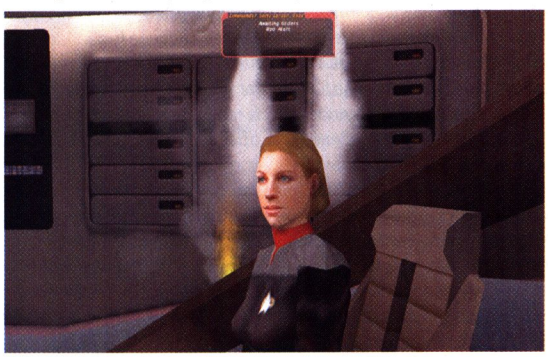
this, *Bridge Commander* is a superb game, and one that has managed to capture the fluid nature of *Star Trek*'s ship-to-ship combat like no computer game before. This is partly to do with the first-person view you get as you sit in the captain's chair, as rather than watch a generic viewscreen from a faceless void, you sit among a crew that in game terms at least, is real. Simply move the mouse to look around and click the button to access a particular crew member's station. It's this same feature that in *B-17: The Mighty 8th* (*PCZ* #96) made for such an engaging flight simulation; to actually see and interact with your crew made you more protective of them, even on a very crude and basic level, especially when you are placed in the world alongside them. In *Bridge Commander*'s case though, the crew are thrown about in typical *Trek* fashion; equipment starts sparking when the ship is under fire, but you never lose a crew member to injury – which is something of a missed opportunity (see box below).

The main reason for *Bridge Commander*'s success at transferring *Star Trek*'s more static combat to the PC screen has to do with how the developer has handled the interface. In the past you might have controlled your ship by handholding your crew (in other words, you probably had to do everything yourself). Here however, you can pretty much leave them to it and issue orders whenever you see fit. It may sound like things are being taken out of your hands, but in actual fact it allows you to look at the bigger picture: keep an eye on other ships, re-allocate power settings and transfer repair crews to fix torpedo tubes if needed. Of course, you can take direct control of helm or tactical if you so wish; speed up, turn left (among other more exotic directions), target phasers and torpedos and so on. In fact, as the game progresses you sometimes do need to take over, but it never feels overwhelming (as it did in *Klingon Academy*), especially if you have one of Microsoft's GameVoice devices. You can use this to issue orders as they were meant to be – by the power of the spoken word, while keeping your digits free for other things.

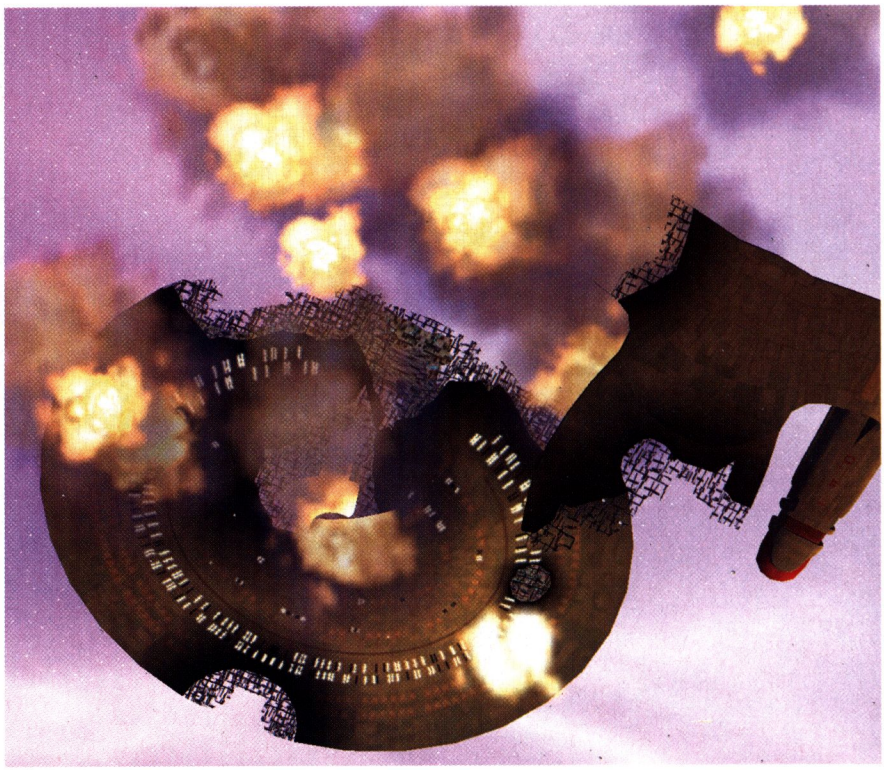
MISSED OPPORTUNITY

IF ONLY THEY'D ADDED...

Whether at the behest of *Star Trek* owners Paramount or a design decision, *Bridge Commander* suffers slightly in that none of your crew ever become injured. Yet throughout the course of the game, you will probably destroy more than 100 enemy ships (probably more than Kirk and Picard ever did combined). But why not kill off, or at least injure some of your crew? It would have added another dimension to the game. Say a grizzly doctor arrives on the bridge to take away your injured helmsman, you then have the problem of drafting in an understudy or taking over the station yourself. You could then add an RPG element to the proceedings... nothing too complicated, mind, but enough to add another level of interaction to the game. Ah well, maybe the sequel...



You'd miss her if she was carried off on a stretcher.



The explosions are actually quite disappointing.

PHASER SURGERY

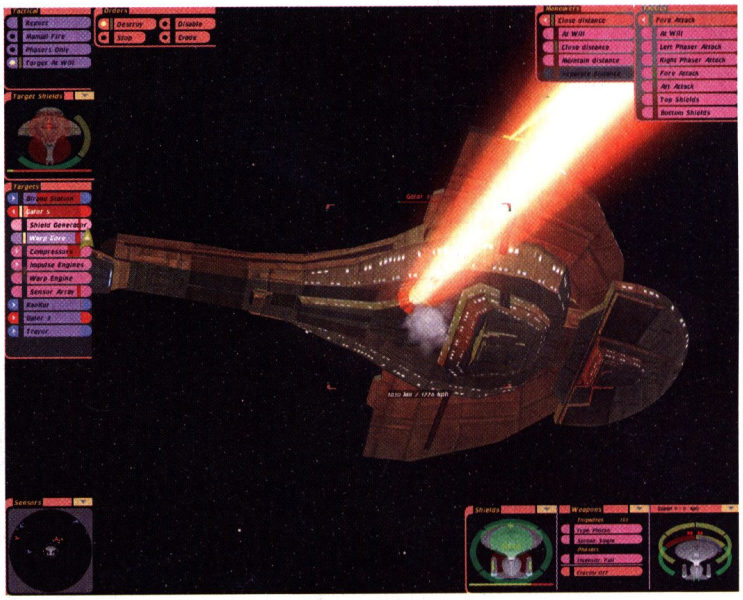
Certainly as the game grinds on, you will use the first-person bridge view less and less, and rely more on the outside camera views. You could argue at this point that the bridge view is nothing more than a gimmick and in a sense you'd be right. However, as I said, the bridge view is more than an interface – it's how you get to know your crew and feel part of the game. Deep into the game however, it's via the outside view that you'll pull off the greatest victories, thanks to a target lock camera, where it's as if you and your enemy are at either end of a taut rope, with your ship at the centre of the screen. Nothing ingenious there since it's a staple feature of



"Sir, do all Cardassions wear spoons on their foreheads?"



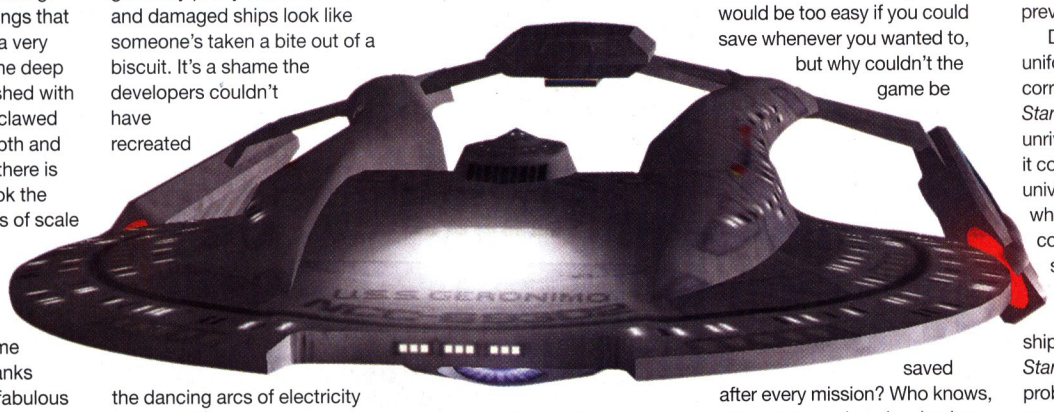
"Sheilds holding steady, captain."



The command interface is incredibly detailed.

many flight simulations, but along with other camera modes it adds immeasurably to the cinematic feel of the combat, especially since the battles all take place in true 3D space, yet never, ever feel disorientating.

Certainly it helps things that *Bridge Commander* is a very attractive game, with the deep space backdrops, brushed with spiralling nebulae and clawed dust clouds adding depth and colour where typically there is none. The ships too look the part, especially in terms of scale as you manoeuvre out of a starbase after some much-needed repairs. But it's during the battles that the game really comes to life, thanks in no small part to the fabulous graphical effects; fire your phasers at an enemy ship and his shields will glow as the energy is absorbed. The telling spikes of Photon torpedos arc convincingly through the void and inside the ships themselves the characters move and look fairly convincing, until they open their lips to show a frightening black space where teeth and gums should be – not pretty. The game does have other graphical oddities. Planets, though suitably gargantuan, are generally pretty dull to look at and damaged ships look like someone's taken a bite out of a biscuit. It's a shame the developers couldn't have recreated the dancing arcs of electricity we sometimes see as the ships in the films are destroyed – certainly it's a shame there are no really impressive explosions, or indeed instances in the game itself where you must quickly escape a ship counting down to self-destruct its warp engine, *à la Wrath Of Khan*.

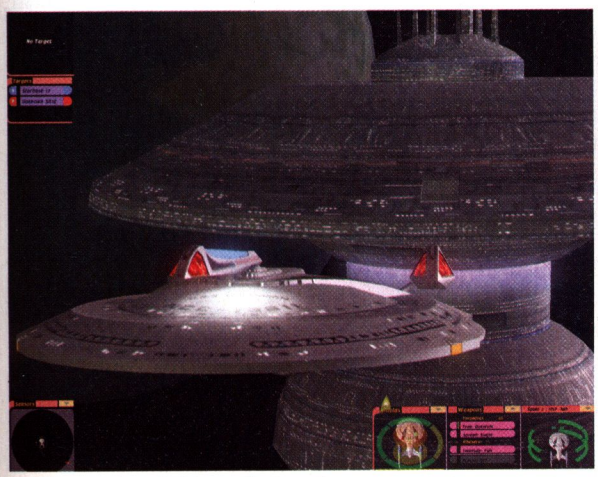


EARL GREY, HOT

There are other niggles that are initially disappointing but soon lose importance. The music is repetitive, yet turn it off and the bridge becomes ominously silent thanks to a complete lack of background noise. Voices too can become jumbled as you quickly give out orders and everyone ends up speaking at the same time. Top of the league of little niggles however is the savegame feature, which in true console fashion, is automatic after every second or third mission. No doubt the game would be too easy if you could save whenever you wanted to, but why couldn't the game be saved after every mission? Who knows, but as you can imagine, having fought to the end of a third successive battle only to lose it and go back to the beginning, is frustrating in the extreme. However, thanks to the addictive qualities of the battles, after a quick cup of Earl Grey I was back at the helm having forgotten the previous annoyance.

"The game comes to life during the battles thanks to the fabulous graphical effects"

Despite the ridiculous uniforms and grating political correctness of the TV shows, *Star Trek* has always been unrivalled in science fiction when it comes to offering a complete universe to get lost in. And while *Bridge Commander* is completely lacking in any sense of freedom in terms of its story, it is probably the finest example of capital ship combat you'll find on PC – *Star Trek* or otherwise – and probably one of the few *Star Trek* games over the years that has used the licence wisely. Like Raven's *Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force*, *Bridge Commander* offers a thrilling ride, perfectly capturing the *Star Trek* universe though it unfortunately lacks the freedom of some of its TV episodes. PCZ



The sense of scale is very impressive.



Set power settings and repair tasks for the engineering officer.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Captures *Star Trek* combat
- ✔ Tactically a highly polished game
- ✔ First-person bridge view adds personality to the game
- ✔ Impressive sense of scale
- ✘ Mission structure far too rigid
- ✘ Could do with some character development

83

Engaging and original combat game let down by a restrictive story

GLOBAL OPERATIONS

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: Barking Dog | ETA: March 17 | Web: www.globalopsgame.com | Players: 1-32

REQUIRES PIII 500 128Mb RAM, 16Mb graphics card **DESIRES** A 32Mb 3D card

The *Counter-Strike* throne is finally under fire. *Mark Hill* looks at the damage

THERE'S A GAME that has dominated our lives for so long we'd started to believe we would never stop playing it. Lunchtimes were the highlight of the day, not because we got to stuff our faces with overpriced sandwiches, but because the whole building would launch *Counter-Strike* and start shooting the hell out of each other. Then we'd go home and play it online. This was actually considered normal. But in the last six months our enthusiasm has waned to such a degree you're more likely to catch the *ZONE* monitors displaying exciting games of *Solitaire* come 1pm. Some people have gone so far as to uninstall *Half-Life* from their machines and go and sit in the park for an hour. This is now actually considered normal.

It's not that surprising really. Although *CS* is still the most popular online shooter by far, it's reaching the end of its long life cycle. And there's a whole bunch of titles snapping at its heels fighting to replace it, with *Global Ops* the first one out of the bag.

MASSES AGAINST THE CLASSES

While the similarities with *CS* are obvious (it's no coincidence that developer Barking Dog was involved in the Beta 5 version) it's the differences that will determine its success. And there are more than a few. The first and most obvious is that *Global Ops* follows the time-honoured tradition of that other massive *Half-Life* mod, *Team Fortress*, and introduces a class system. Choosing to be a demolitions expert, sniper, commando, medic, recon or heavy gunner limits which weapons you can buy and how you play the game, although the constraints are nowhere near as rigid as they are in *Team Fortress*. You can even pick up weapons belonging to other classes once you're on the battlefield. There's also the option to be a strategist directing operations as the Intelligence Officer, although, we're not sure this idea will take off online.

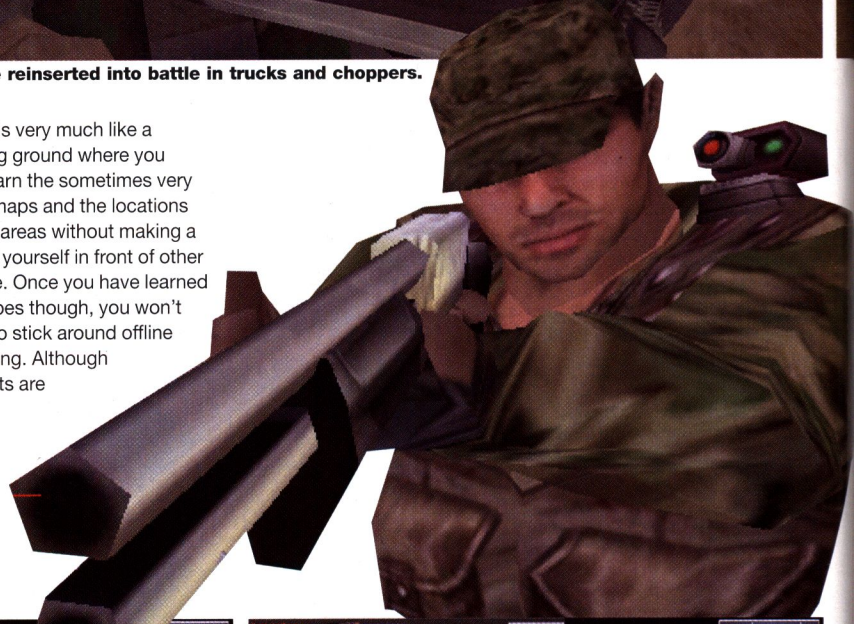
Each mission is set in a real-world location, and brings along with it a pseudo-plot involving more diverse objectives than *CS* players are used to. While there are still a lot of hostage rescue and bombing missions, you also have to retrieve chemical substances or take command of a ship. You're hardly encouraged to become engrossed in a story but each level has its own set of skins for both sides, making it easier to believe it's a real setting rather than one of *Counter-Strike*'s anonymous sandboxes. This aspect also makes *Global Ops* one of the best multi-racial games around, since in missions in places like Uganda and Peru you play the local law enforcement or resident bad guys instead of a self-important Western force that sticks its nose into every foreign country.

STAYING SINGLE?

Global Ops also features a single-player campaign, but you shouldn't go into this expecting *Unreal Tournament* or *Quake III*. The single-player game is very much like a training ground where you can learn the sometimes very large maps and the locations of key areas without making a fool of yourself in front of other people. Once you have learned the ropes though, you won't want to stick around offline very long. Although the bots are

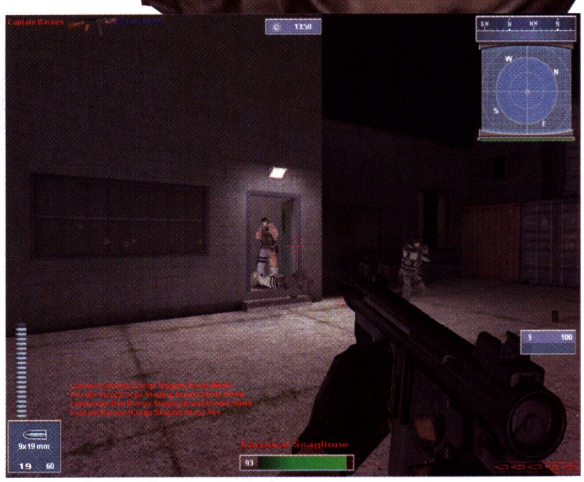


You're reinserted into battle in trucks and choppers.





The single-player bots usually end up in a body bag.



Expect plenty of user-created maps to appear.

INPERSPECTIVE

COUNTER-STRIKE
Reviewed Issue 98
The most popular mod of all time and still the most played online shooter. You can't call yourself a gamer if you haven't played it.

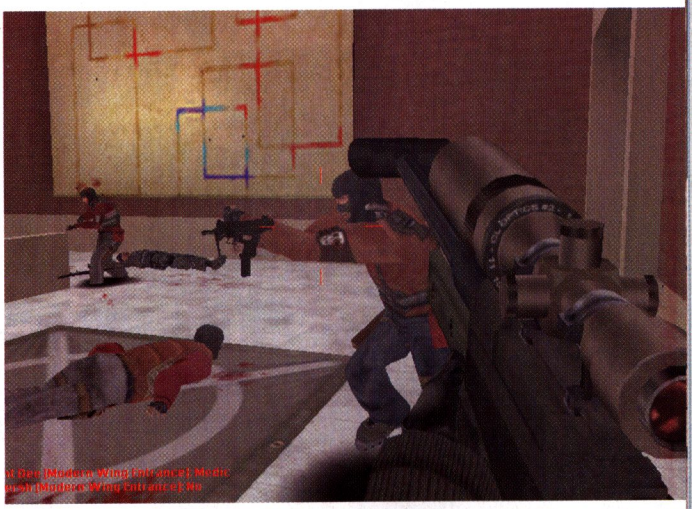
GHOST RECON
Reviewed Issue 110
For a more tactical team-based game with proper single-player try this stealthy shooter, which takes you outdoors for some intense action.

"The single-player game is much like a training ground"



Locations are quite different from each other but they're not very detailed.







Should you really be shooting doctors?

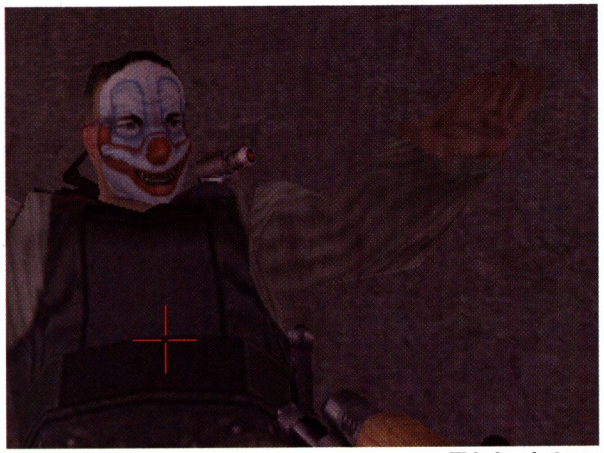
programmed to carry out the mission objectives, the AI is nowhere near good enough to compare to a multiplayer game. You can give your team simple orders (like retreat or back you up, although they usually ignore them anyway). You can click on a couple of them to follow you like *Half-Life* guards, but stealth and tactics play no part in it. Both sets of bots just run wildly ahead and start shooting until they're gunned down. Most of the time they complete the missions without you even knowing what's going on or where they've gone, reinforcing the idea this is just a way of learning the levels, not a game in itself.

It helps that you don't have to sit out a round every time you die. Taking a leaf out of the *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* book, there are reinforcement periods where you can return or, if you prefer, you can just lie on the floor writhing in agony until a medic comes and revives you.

NO DUST

It's quite difficult to say at this early stage whether *Global Ops* is a real challenger – online games usually take a few months before either establishing themselves or disappearing down the pan. The LithTech engine doesn't really offer much of an improvement over *Counter-Strike* in the graphics department and we're not convinced the maps can compete with the likes of Dust, Militia and Italy. Besides, *Counter-Strike* is usually played as a team deathmatch – killing the other side being loads more fun than completing objectives – and *Global Ops* is very much an objective-driven game.

Expect a review update soon, when the whole thing kicks off properly online and the first mods start to trickle in. After all, this is just the beginning. PZ



This is what you should do if you ever see a clown.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ No cheating
- ✔ Realistic settings and character models
- ✔ Lots of good ideas
- ✘ Single-player is a letdown
- ✘ Maps not as good as *Counter-Strike*'s
- ✘ Graphics are plain

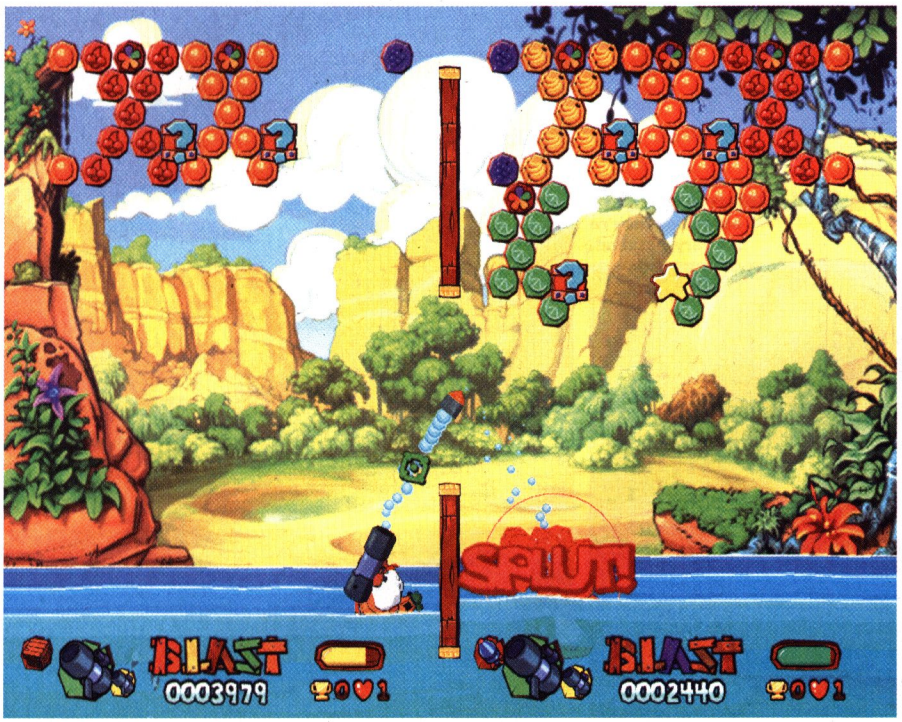
78

Solid multiplayer fun, but not a *Counter-Strike* challenger just yet

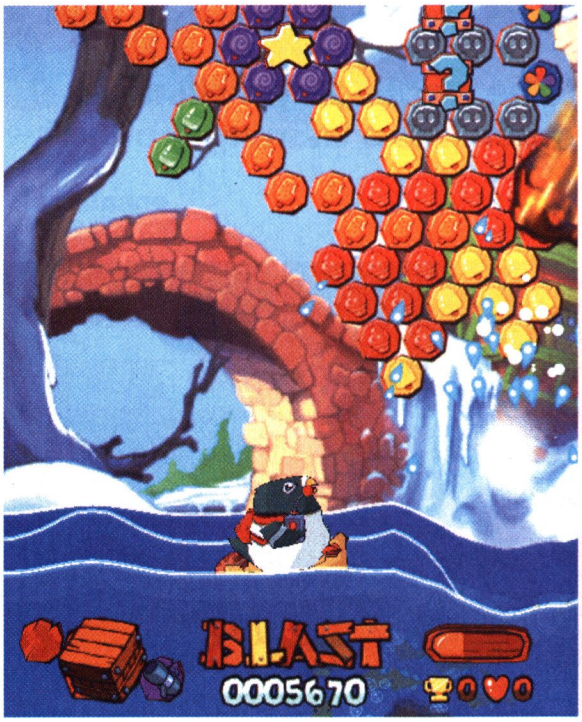
NO CHEATERS HERE

BARKING DOG IS CLAIMING IT WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE TO CHEAT IN GLOBAL OPS

The main reason we stopped playing *Counter-Strike* online – a long time ago – was that we got sick and tired of the rampant cheating. Cheating in multiplayer games, especially when it's done just to spoil the fun of others, is about the lowest you can go. What's the point of taking part when half of the people playing can shoot you on sight automatically or make themselves invisible and the other half is complaining about the cheating? Barking Dog is doing its best to avoid this happening to its game and there's not even a console to type things into. But hackers like nothing better than a challenge, and this might be the proverbial red flag to the bull. But this could still be *Global Ops*' trump card for winning over ex-*CS* players.



The ability to fire directly at your opponent is, tellingly, the game's best feature.



Weapons crates, not screen-clearing, is the way to victory.



WORMS BLAST

■ £19.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Team 17 | ETA: March 29 | Web: wormsblast.team17.com

REQUIRES PII 350, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 450, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card

Worms meets *Puzzle Bobble* meets *Anthony Holden*

IN PERSPECTIVE

BUST A MOVE 4
Reviewed Issue 85
This instalment of the basic bubble popping model is much the same as its predecessors

MR DRILLER
Reviewed Issue 104
A hugely addictive drilling affair, available for less than a tenner

LET'S BE brutally honest. The whole *Worms* thing is little more than a cutesified reworking of a blueprint laid down by *Scorched Earth* and other artillery combat games over a decade ago, smeared with enough visual gloss and innocuous humour to fool the kids into thinking they're having fun. Load up on weapons, generate some destroyable terrain and use the science of ballistics to obliterate your opponents. Strength, elevation, wind adjust... fire! Actually, come to think of it, it was kind of fun, despite being almost entirely unoriginal, and funnily enough this seems to have set the precedent for Team 17's latest outing, *Worms Blast*.

For those who haven't put two and two together yet, this is not just another *Worms* game. It's not turn-based nor is it team-based, there's no Ninja Ropes or Ming Vases, just a few worms/sheep/donkeys, a handful of weapons and loads of, er... bobbles. That's right, bobbles, or 'cells' as they're called here. Why? Because, as vehemently as the publicity tries to deny it, *Worms Blast* is the inbred love child of *Worms* and arcade puzzler *Puzzle Bobble*.

SQUEAL LIKE A WORM

But, you persist, does it work? Well, as anyone who has ever looked on their cousin with more than just familial warmth will tell you, inbred children tend to have moments of both toothless, slack-jawed stupidity and sporadic banjo-duelling virtuosity, and *Worms Blast* is no exception.

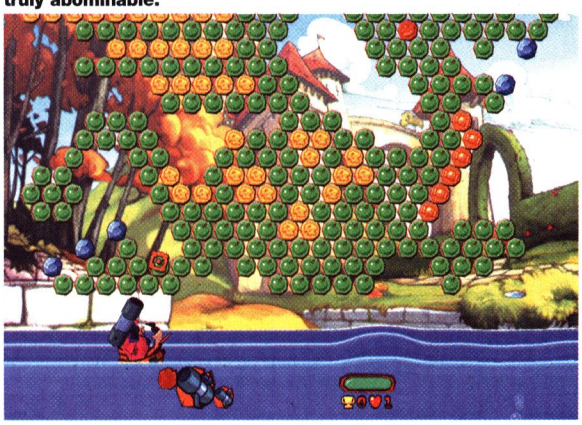
At a glance, it is *Puzzle Bobble*, but with worms firing bazookas out of boats instead of a central bubble launcher. Enough familiar elements have been retained for the game to be at once instantly accessible and painfully apish – rows of steadily descending cells, coloured projectiles, and the ability to add to your opponent's headaches at a stroke.

GOING BALLISTIC

Where things take a huge turn is with the addition of *Worms*-style artillery, signalling a shift from sniper-scope accuracy and frantic screen-clearing to a slower, less panicky affair in which the liberation of weapon crates is key. Rather than losing when the orbs hit the ground, you only die if your boat is sunk or the lower cells hit you on the head – often leading to moments of hair-pulling injustice when you die from the merest bump against some danglers. Rising water levels, falling objects and a health bar also jostle for your attention, but the most enlivening feature is a gate which opens up between the two halves of the playing field, allowing players to lob missiles at each other. Of course there's also a wide selection of extra weapons and power-ups to employ, mostly designed to drop something nasty in your opponent's lap.

While the purity of the bubble-popping concept is essentially bastardised by all these elements, most of it meshes surprisingly well and the end result is, in the grand tradition of *Worms*, a good laugh with a mate, if not particularly original. Then again all this describes only the main head-to-head mode in the game, on top of which exists a huge overabundance of crap variations and single-player puzzle modes that no-one will ever play. Not an essential purchase for *Worms* fans then, but could be a bit of fun when it hits budget – something I'd imagine will happen all too quickly. PZ

The single-player puzzle modes are truly abominable.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Good clean fun with a mate
- ✔ Lots of comical ways to annoy your opponent
- ✔ Plenty of *Worms* in-jokes
- ✘ Rubbish single-player modes
- ✘ Poorly balanced bonus weapons and power-ups

62

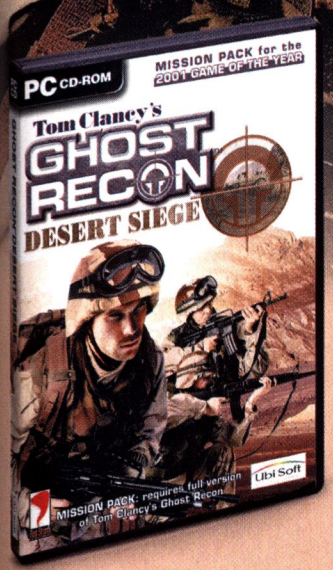
Just treading water

Tom Clancy's GHOST RECON™

A NEW ENEMY... A NEW CHALLENGE



THE MISSION PACK

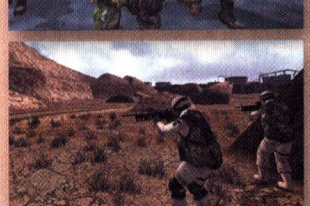


East Africa, 2009. A simmering 60-year conflict boils over as famine ravages Eritrea. It's gonna get hot! No shade and little shelter in this arid and unforgiving environment mean you will need new weapons as you fight against an enemy with a new strategy. Welcome to desert warfare.

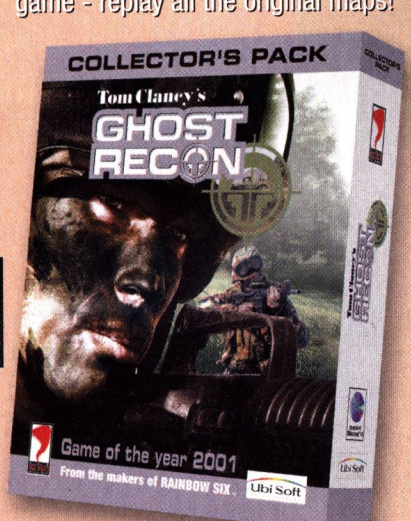
- 8 new single-player missions & 4 new dedicated multi-player environments
- New Multi-Player Modes: Team-based "Siege" and "Domination" modes
- "Domination" mode is backwards compatible with your original Ghost Recon game - replay all the original maps!







THE COLLECTORS PACK



- TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON (STANDARD GAME)
- THE MISSION PACK
- FREE GHOST RECON STRATEGY GUIDE OFFER
- THE "MAKING OF" CD
- GHOST RECON "SKULL" ARM BADGE

PC gameplay GOLD

GAME OF DISTINCTION PC GAMER January 2002

PC ZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

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GAME OF THE YEAR 2001 • IGN.COM

GHOST RECON RATED GAME OF THE YEAR 2001 BY IGN.COM AND PC GAMER US

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www.ghostrecon.co.uk

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One of the more colourful spells in your arsenal.



I have a strange feeling that it's all about to go horribly wrong.



DISCIPLES II: DARK PROPHECY

■ £29.99 | Pub: Strategy First | Dev: Strategy First | ETA: March | Web: www.strategyfirst.com

REQUIRES PII 233, 32Mb RAM, 8Mb 3D Card **DESIRES** PII 300, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card

A touch of déjà vu sweeps over *Chris Anderson* as he plays another 'tribute' turn-based strategy RPG

NO matter how much you may hope for a new game in your genre of choice that breaks all boundaries or even treads slightly new territory, you know as well as I do that it's never going to happen. *Etherlords* may well have raised the benchmark for combat graphics in turn-based strategy games, but the gameplay is still all too familiar.

Disciples II, for its part, is as close to *Heroes Of Might & Magic III* as it can possibly get without the developers being sued. Take the territory map for example – it's almost identical to *HOM&M III*. That doesn't make *Disciples II* a bad game, it just makes it one you've played before, albeit with minor gameplay tweaks and nuances (presumably to prevent court action).



Haven't we seen this somewhere before?

SAME AGAIN

The familiar premise for gameplay is simplicity itself. Explore the map looking for gold mines and mana spots, fighting battles to gain experience for your heroes and also for the units in your party (in this respect *DII* differs from *HOM&M III* in that individual units gain levels and even new classes as they progress). There are spells to be researched and used both in the world map and in the battle screen, there are structures to be built, which you can upgrade your units with over time, and there are mundane quests to waste your time with, which give you unique items and advantages. Generally speaking, just about all the 'vital' ingredients for a respectable turn-based RPG are present and correct in *Disciples II*.

THE X FACTOR

You may well be thinking *Disciples II* is just another average RPG to add to the many already in existence. Well technically, it is, but in practice it has that inexplicable ability to keep pulling you back for more. The gameplay elements may well be tried and tested and nothing new, but they blend together in such a way as to make for an addictive and engrossing gameplay experience, much in the same way the *Heroes* series does. The only thing that stops *DII* getting an unreserved recommendation is its woeful presentation. The graphics, as you can see from the screenshots on this page, are tripe. If you like tasty visuals with your addictive gameplay, ditch this and go for *Etherlords*. If you don't care either way, you could do a lot worse than *Disciples II* to get your turn-based RPG fix. PZ

INPERSPECTIVE

ETHERLORDS
Reviewed Issue 112
The benchmark game for the genre, *Etherlords* features superb gameplay and stunning graphics.

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III
Reviewed Issue 76
The third outing of *HOM&M* remains the best. There's not much to choose between it and *Disciples II*.

PCZONE VERDICT

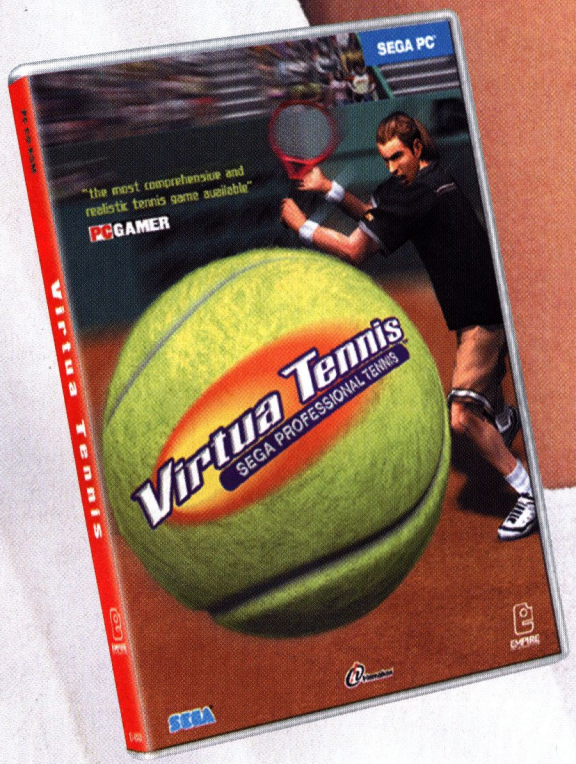
- ✔ Fairly addictive in the 'usual' way
- ✔ All your units advance in unique ways, not just the heroes
- ✔ Simple and intuitive interface
- ✘ Been there, seen it, done it
- ✘ Awful graphics
- ✘ Repetitive after extended play

75

Better than it looks

SEGA PC™

MAKES OTHER TENNIS GAMES LOOK A**E!



The number one seed that brought the crowd to it's feet is back for second service on PC.

All your favourite rallies and players are here - now with enhanced graphics and added Network Play!

So don't get a bum deal with an inferior title, Virtua Tennis leaves the rest well and truly behind.

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Cossacks

The Art of War







PC Zone "The epic just got bigger and better"

PC Gamer "An impressive array of new elements, campaigns, options and two brand new nations"

PC Zone "Turning historical warfare into an art form"

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Features:

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The Official Expansion Pack to the Biggest RTS game of 2001

Cossacks: European Wars, more than 450,000 copies sold worldwide!

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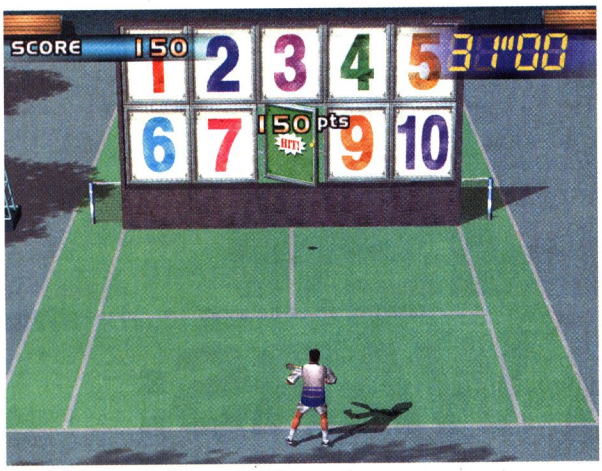
cdv

VIRTUA TENNIS

■ £29.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | Dev: Rowan Software | ETA: March 15 | Web: www.empireinteractive.co.uk

REQUIRES PII 450, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 800, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb graphics card

An ace, or a straight sets defeat? Today's umpire: *Steve Hill*



One of the many diverse training modes.

CONSOLE conversions are a contentious issue at the best of times, not least when the game being converted is 18 months old and has already spawned a superior sequel. That's the story here though, as Empire attempts to breathe life into Sega's classic Dreamcast title, itself a conversion of the arcade game.

Something of a hand-me-down situation then, but one that has nevertheless retained the integrity of the game. If you've never played *Virtua Tennis*, here's the deal. A supremely intuitive affair, its simplicity is the key, largely relying on just one button. In that sense, it's the tennis equivalent of *Sensible Soccer* (and praise comes no higher). There is a rarely used lob button, but essentially the key moves come down to a solitary knob, something that will be repellent to flight sim fans and their keyboard overlays.

STRAWBERRIES

However, this doesn't mean that it's a simple game, as the ball can be knocked to virtually anywhere on the court by adroitly tweaking the joypad at the moment of impact. Once mastered, it's a gloriously playable system, and one that makes for some quality action. Even if you consider tennis to be the sport of fools (and I personally find Wimbledon the most boring fortnight of the year), it's hard not to get sucked in once you get the hang of it, which should take no more than five minutes for all but the most cack-handed buffoon.

Like the best sports games, it isn't about mastering the interface, but mastering the actual sport, and you will have to employ genuine tennis tactics to get results. Even if you've never played the game, it soon becomes evident what you have to do, be it forcing your opponent into a corner, or getting up to the net and cracking in some volleys. The eight computer-controlled players all behave differently, and getting the measure of your opponent is crucial.

CREAM

Various options are available, including a World Circuit in which you complete short matches and training modes, some of which are passable mini-games themselves. Success opens up further options, and also enables you to win money, which can be spent on such treats as different coloured shirts, or even a doubles partner. It's amazing what money can buy.

Graphically, the conversion may look crisper than its Dreamcast counterpart, but seems to have lost some of its subtleties, such as the motion blur in the replays and the barely discernible cloud shadows, which appear here as if the apocalypse were pending. It's still basically the same game though, as evinced by the words 'press start' on the menu screen. Crucially, the gameplay has remained intact, and if you don't own a Dreamcast this is definitely worth a look. Ace. PZ



INPERSPECTIVE

TENNIS MASTERS SERIES
Reviewed Issue 110
With excellent AI and diverse opponents, this is a quality bit of the old bat and racket game. Still the best on the PC.

OPEN TENNIS 2000
Reviewed Issue 92
An initially tricky control interface turns out to be a real gem. Shame about the AI though. Available now at a budget price.

PCZONE VERDICT

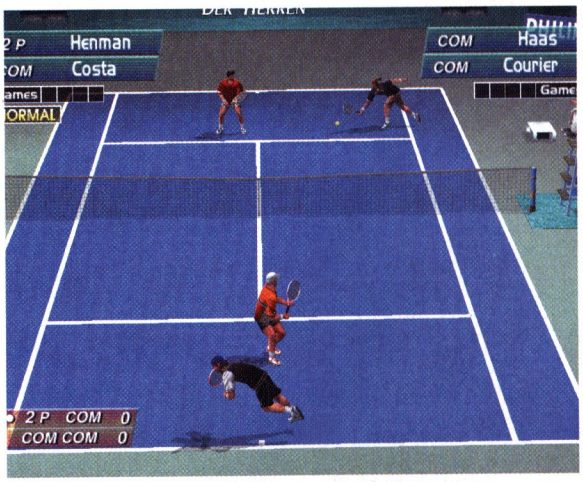
- ✔ Intuitive play
- ✔ Simple controls
- ✔ Great for multiplayer
- ✘ No women
- ✘ It's better on Dreamcast

80

Solid conversion of a great game



Tennis played on grass, the English way.



Get over!



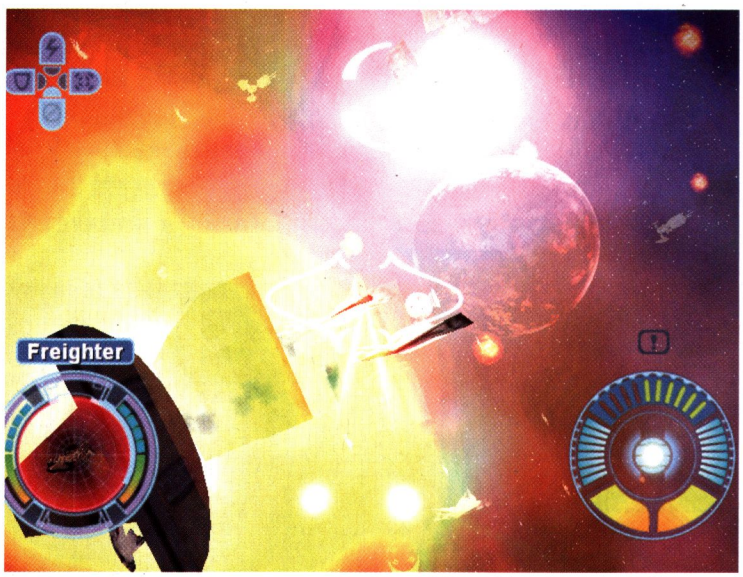
The alternate view catches Henman out.



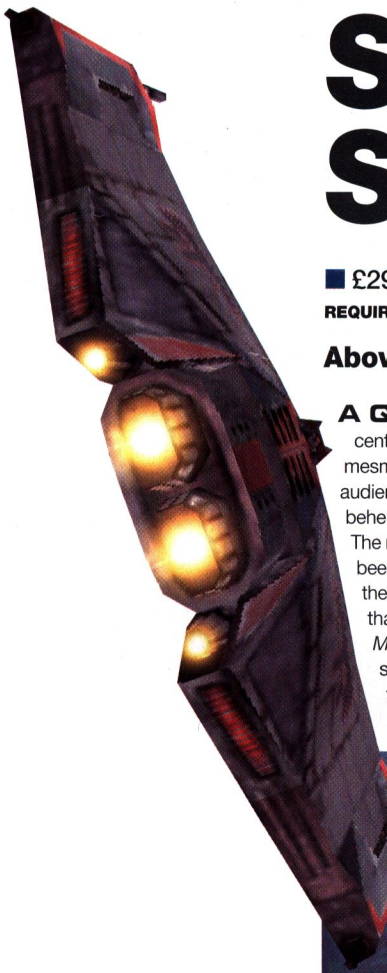
Come on lads, take it home.



It just would't be Star Wars without a bit of canyon surfing



Make that an ex-freighter.



STAR WARS: STARFIGHTER

■ £29.99 | Pub: LucasArts | Dev: Secret Level | ETA: Out Now | Web: www.lucasarts.com

REQUIRES PIII 350, 64Mb RAM, 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 450, 128Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card

Above average Star Wars shooty game? Better call *Steve Hill*

A QUARTER of a century after the original film mesmerised an unsuspecting audience, the *Star Wars* behemoth rolls on inexorably. The mythology may have been irreversibly diluted by the glorified *Muppet Show* that was *The Phantom Menace*, but that hasn't stopped games publishers further cheapening it with a succession of substandard efforts. Then to top it all, George Lucas casually announces that the next film is to be called *Attack Of The Clones*, a name even Jedi Ewan McGregor has understatedly dismissed as "not good".

So where does *Star Wars: Starfighter* sit among the detritus of official merchandise? A year after it was released on PlayStation 2, it's little more than a footnote, somewhere between a branded pencil case and a box set of the original trilogy. If you've played *Rogue Squadron* or *Battle For Naboo*, you'll know the form, and in many ways this completes that particular trilogy, providing something of an attack of the clones itself.

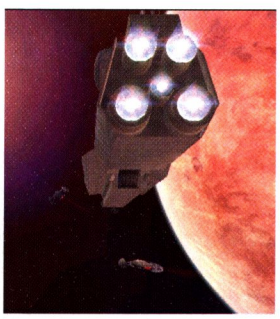
CRAFT WORK

The concept is identical to that of those two games, and as such involves a succession of linear missions played out in a variety of craft, interspersed with cut scenes to "progress the narrative". Taking place in the period before *Episode One*, it's a confusing tale, but one involving the *Star Wars* staple of avenging death and shooting stuff.

Beginning as a fresh-faced cadet, your trainer tragically buys the farm, leaving you a bitter man intent on vengeance. Rhys Dallows is the name,



Some of the space battles border on the epic.





INPERSPECTIVE

STAR WARS: BATTLE FOR NABOO
Reviewed Issue 103
More of the same, this sees you protecting the pretty planet and saving the cute ickle Queen.

STAR WARS: ROGUE SQUADRON
Reviewed Issue 73
It's the same format, but somehow it's far more satisfying to drag down a Walker or stick one up a Stormtrooper.

FEEL THE FORCE, OR FORCE THE FEEL?

PROOF THAT THE STAR WARS LICENCE CAN SELL EVEN AN AVERAGE GAME

A fairly straightforward space shooter, without the *Star Wars* license, *Starfighter* would be deservedly dismissed with little fuss. The heritage of the world's favourite film demands attention though, and the game is undoubtedly indebted to that history. Who can resist the essential battle of good against evil in this most seductive of modern day fairytales? When the titles roll into the distance, and you're left staring into space to the sound of John Williams' haunting score, the magic is strong. As the sound of a spaceship rips through your speakers, an epic story begins. It's like 1977 again, as you gaze at the world of wonder in front of you. After that, it's all bollocks. Naboo? Who cares? Trade Federation? What's that? Where's Darth Vader, and the walking carpet? Forget it.

and the voice acting is enough to make Mark Hamill look like a true professional. This standard continues, throughout the game. Conventional wisdom suggests the word 'turret' boasts two syllables, but here it's reduced to a solitary slur, redolent of Brando's "the horror" in *Apocalypse Now*. Also, your R2 unit appears to be called Reg, although on closer inspection it's probably Wrench. Which is a shame.

The second character is hard-faced mercenary, Vana Sage, surely a contender for a porno name. Interested more in money than idealism, she'll fight for any side if the price is right. The unlikely triumvirate is completed by alien pirate, Nym, one of those blue-faced things with tendrils hanging either side of the nose. Together, they must save the galaxy (the one that's far, far away...).

"The second character is hard-faced mercenary, Vana Sage, surely a contender for a porno name"

THREES UP

Played out in a variety of locales, the action offers a reasonable mix of space and land-based blasting, with the lush scenery of Naboo represented in full Bland-O-Vision. The tasks are standard fodder, such as escorting the Queen's ship, protecting the rebel base, and destroying a droid factory, eventually culminating in a Death Star-style showdown. The different scenarios give you the chance to play as the game's three characters, utilising the minor differences of each one's particular ship. It's literally a bloodless affair, as the vast majority of enemies are droids, bypassing the problem of sullying the *Star Wars* universe with the entrails of the dead.

With no option to save mid-mission, it's simply a case of repeating each one until you get it right, although with the majority checking in at under ten minutes, that's no hardship. When you consider there are only 14 missions, you realise it isn't a great deal of bang for your buck, and on the easiest level the game can be completed in a weekend, even with bonus missions.

WEEKENDER

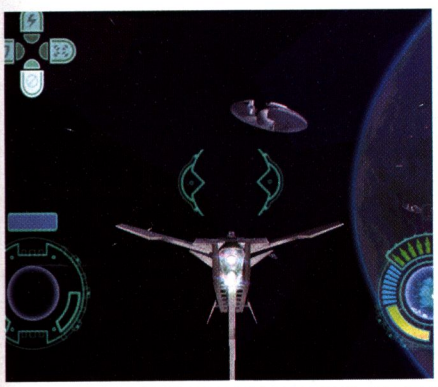
While it lasts though, it's a bit of a blast, as attested by the fact I write these words with no feeling in my right thumb, having tackled the game using an old-skool joystick. The action can get fairly intense, with some of the space battles bordering on epic. Enemies come thick and fast, and while your craft are quite sluggish, they're just about manoeuvrable enough to take evasive action. Nominal instructions can be given to wingmen, but in the context of the mainly scripted action, it doesn't make a great deal of difference. It's simply about following the instructions, which are at least presented in the form of in-game dialogue.

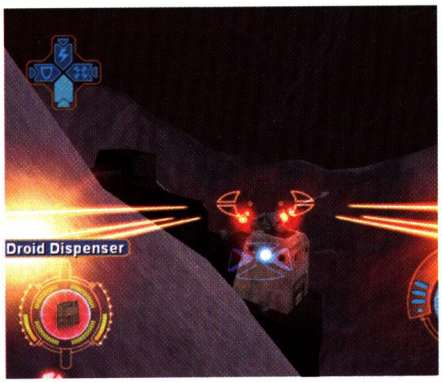
In the short term, *Starfighter* is highly addictive, as were its predecessors. However, once completed there isn't a great deal of value in re-treading missions. To paraphrase Craig David, you could buy the game on Saturday, foil the Trade Federation on Sunday, take it down the Computer Exchange on Monday... PCZ

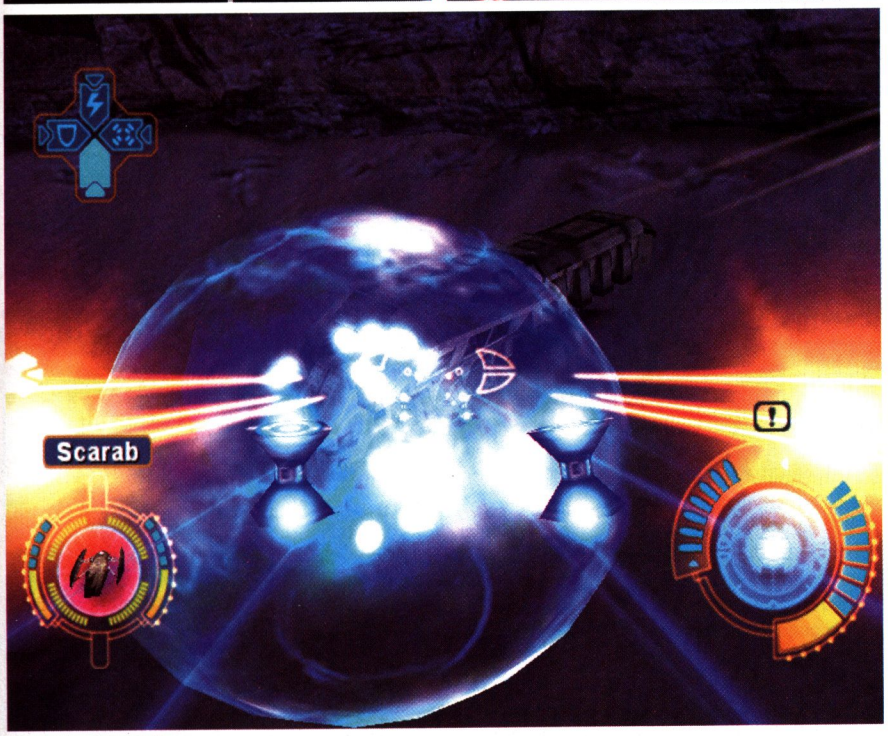




Looks like an invasion may be afoot.







That should get it.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Intense action while it lasts
- ✔ Decent music
- ✘ You can finish it in a weekend
- ✘ No mid-mission save
- ✘ Vague storyline

65

Attack of the clowns



The trade map shows which goods each territory is rich in.



Playing as a Mel Gibson-inspired fledgling United States is a challenge.

EUROPA UNIVERSALIS II

■ £29.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Paradox | ETA: March 2 | Web: www.paradoxplaza.com

REQUIRES PII 233, 64Mb RAM **DESIRES** PII 450, 128Mb RAM

It's a degree and PhD in strategy in one. *Steve O'Hagan* enrols



Only the foolhardy will dive in without doing the tutorials.

INPERSPECTIVE

CIVILIZATION III
Reviewed Issue 111
It may be turn-based but it's one of the finest marriages of playability and strategy money can buy

COSSACKS: ART OF WAR
Reviewed Issue 113
Send legions of musketeers into the jaws of death in this cataclysmic Napoleonic add-on to one of the finest strategy games of last year.

THESE DAYS,

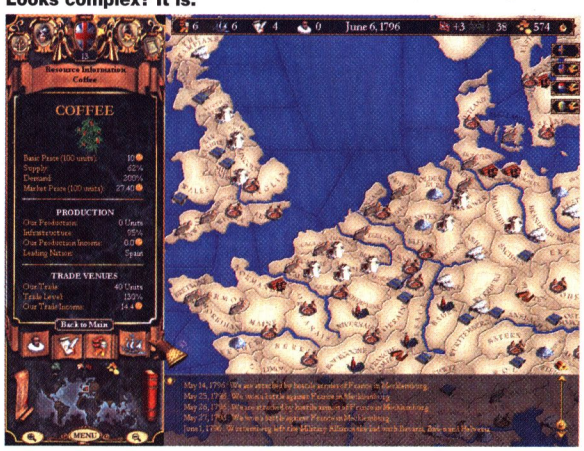
EU stands for European Union, a movement of nations coming together in harmony to further peaceful development and to champion human rights. But once, EU referred to Europa Universalis, an age when Europe was a playground for power-mad aristocrats, where going to war with one's neighbour was a national pastime and human rights was a concept only slightly less fanciful than time travel.

Europa Universalis II covers the period 1492 to 1820 and despite the name, gives you charge of almost any nation in the world from Afghanistan to America. But be warned. This is the hardcore end of the strategy market. This is game, simulation and history lesson all rolled into one.

The game plays in real time, though you can pause to deliberate decisions. Your goals range from scenario to scenario, and include annexing territories, accruing victory points, exploring a specified part of the globe, or simply maintaining your nation's existence.

As supreme ruler, financial, military, religious, cultural and diplomatic matters must be seen to. Diplomacy requires careful thought to safeguard your reputation. Alliances are not easily made or broken and even declaring war can prove frustratingly hard, with diplomatic justification required first. There are no games of 'sod it, I'll just take everyone on' here.

Looks complex? It is.



WATERLOO AND ALL THAT

Combat is initiated simply by turning up with your army in the same territory as the enemy. Resolution includes variables such as composition of forces, defensive preparations, morale and the ability of the commanders. As it's in real time, you can turn tail mid-battle and flee if things go against you.

But conquering territories is only half the battle. Traders, colonists, missionaries, mayors, judges and more all have to be put in place to pacify new lands. And financing all this expansion can mean the battle against inflation is as hard-fought as the battle against your war-mongering neighbour.

Things are pleasing to the eye in a quaint, board-game kind of way that gives you the feeling of pushing lead soldiers around a table. But the map can be frustrating, with certain information only viewable when it's switched between one of its many modes.

HISTORIC ACHIEVEMENT

It's the scope and the replayability of the game that really sets it apart. The experience of managing say, the Netherlands (weak militarily with a tiny, exposed homeland though great overseas possessions) and Prussia (almost land-locked in the heart of Europe, though strong militarily) lends *EUII* the kind of replayability other games stay awake at night plotting to steal.

This is a comprehensive simulation of the global geo-politics of the era. It's fantastically detailed, and makes few compromises in putting all the power of the decision-making process at your fingertips. But it's not for the lily-livered part-time strategist. Hours are needed to get to grips with it, and a history degree is preferable. PM

PCZONE VERDICT

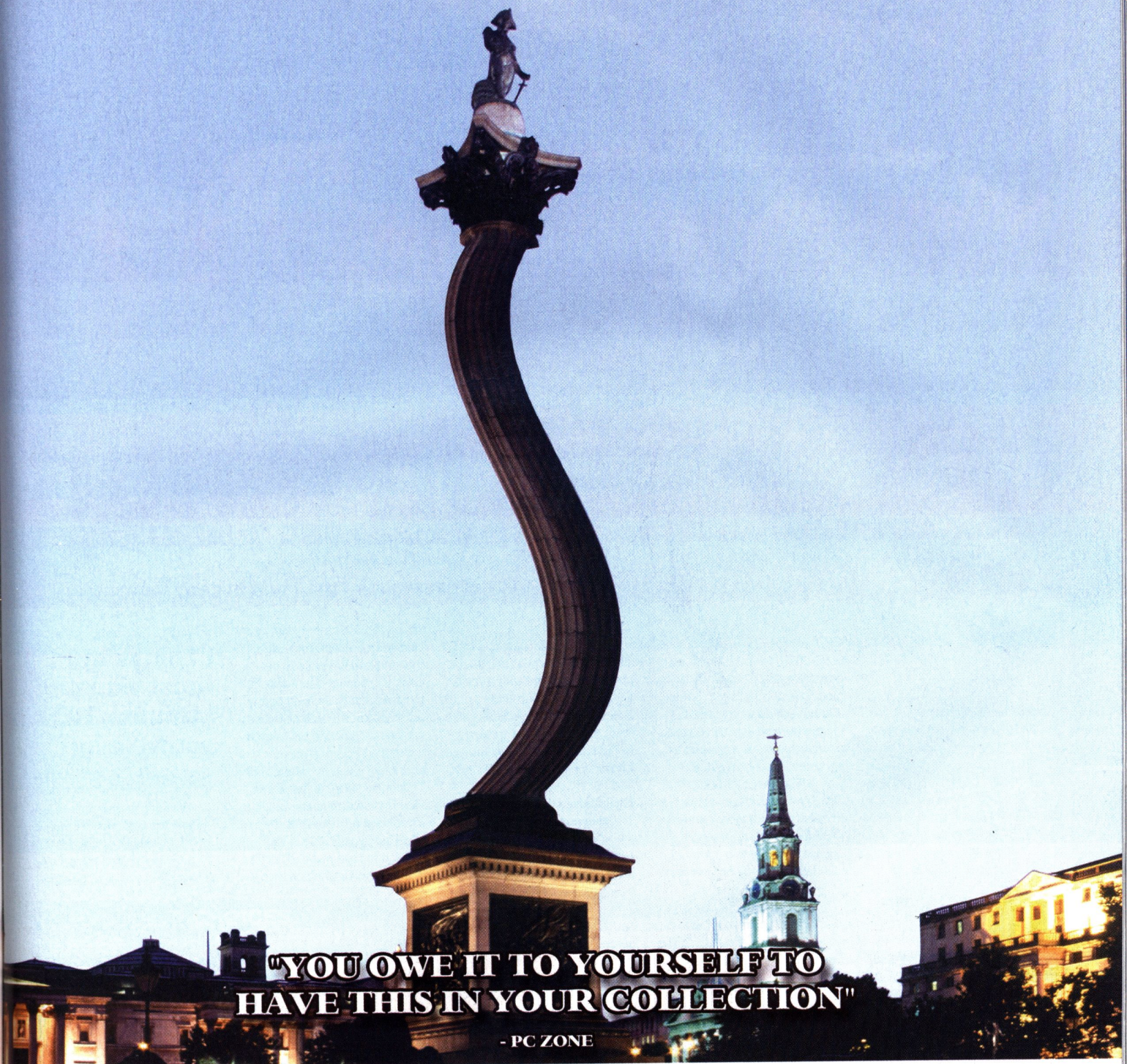
- ✔ Massive range and scope
- ✔ Unbelievable replayability
- ✔ It'll teach you a thing or two
- ✘ The map isn't very user-friendly
- ✘ Too hardcore for most

72

Impressive though daunting empire-building strategy

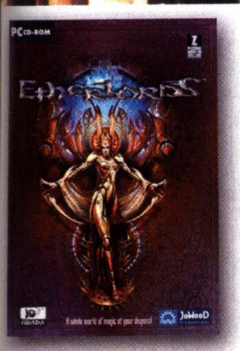
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WARRIOR KINGS

■ £29.99 | Pub: Microids | Dev: Black Cactus | ETA: March 4 | Web: www.blackcactus.com

REQUIRES PII 350, 128Mb RAM, 8Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 733, 256Mb RAM, GeForce 3 3D card

It's finally here! *Martin Korda* gets stuck into one of the most eagerly anticipated RTS games in years

YOU ARE standing in your room, clammy fingers and palms pressed tightly against a glossy black box. Breath enters and leaves your body with uncommon urgency as you slide open the package, revealing a silver disc, inscribed with the words *Warrior Kings*. This glittering plate is a gateway to a mythical land of military strength, multi-faceted strategic options, economic power and clandestine-laced political intrigue, an epic penned by Jamie Thompson, co-author of legendary *Choose Your Own Adventure* series *The Way Of The Tiger*. And just as you were the hero of those books, so too now are you the hero of this review, your choices deciding whether or not *Warrior Kings* is for you. Survive, and you'll know it's your destiny to take the role of Artos, rightful heir to the realm of Cravant in the world of Orbis, forced to reclaim your homeland and unify the land after your father and people are massacred by forces led by a corrupt Bishop. Fail and you'll miss out on the most ambitious RTS to date. Your fate is in your hands. And so it is, that with a quivering, sweat-glazed hand, you insert the CD into your drive and load up the game. If you own at least a PIII 600 with a high-end GeForce 2 or better, go to Paragraph 10 (below). If not, go to Paragraph 1B of the Alternative Choices box (see page 81).

PARAGRAPH 10

The disc grinds to a halt, and the world around you drains away like grains of sand in an egg-timer as you're drawn into a new existence. Stunning, fully interactive 3D landscapes roll endlessly around you, while a gentle fog wafts over a distant lake. Before you, is the most visually stunning RTS you've ever seen. Gone are the flat fingerprint-like smudges of days gone by, graphics which looked like the scribblings of a thumbless newborn, instead replaced by sublime undulations rendered in splendorous 3D. As your PC churns out bump-mapped textures and you smoothly scroll around the map with the simple and intuitive controls, it's instantly clear to you that *Warrior Kings* will be anything but simplistic or average.

Barbarian settlements sully the land and will have to be dealt with if your people are to live in safety, while effective trading routes with other villages will have to be created in order to bolster your economy. If your favourite RTS is *Shogun* or *Battle Realms*, then go to Paragraph 50.
If you're purely into 2D build-and-rush type RTS games, then go to Paragraph 2B of the Alternative Choices box.

"This is the most visually stunning RTS you've ever seen"



Hey boys, this one doesn't like the chilli sauce.

INPERSPECTIVE

SHOGUN TOTAL WAR
Reviewed Issue 89
Still the best strategy game – but only just. *Shogun* pitches you in epic battles where thousands of troops battle it out over a beautiful 3D terrain. Resource management is kept to a minimum.

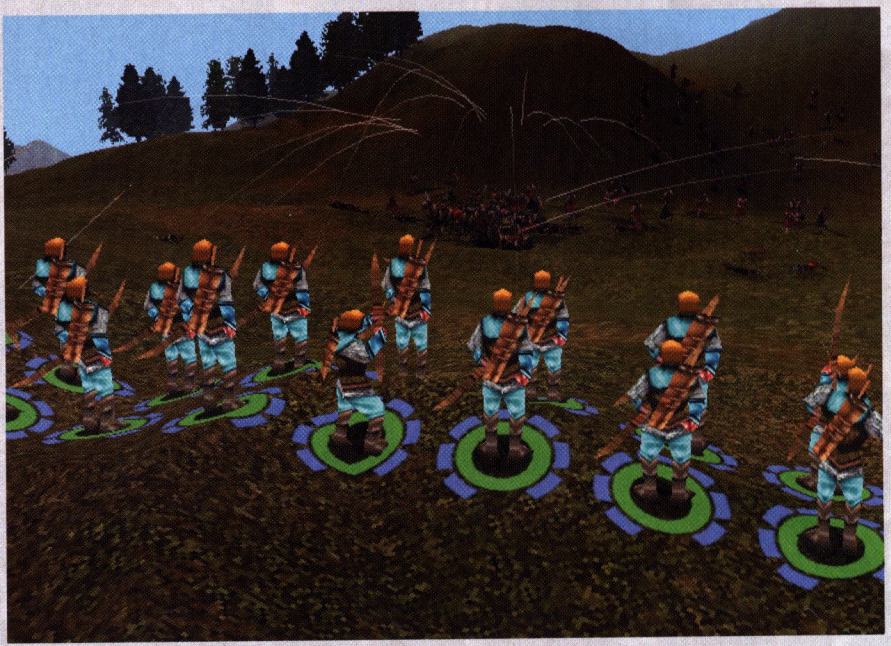
BATTLE REALMS
Reviewed Issue 111
It may not look as impressive but like *Warrior Kings*, it's utterly engrossing. Battles are kept to small groups, meaning strategic use of terrain is even more important than in Black Cactus' outing.





Zooming into battles is nothing short of breathtaking.





Use the high ground to gain the advantage over your enemies.

PARAGRAPH 50

Your love of in-depth tactics has served you well. With the trained eye of an RTS veteran you scan your surroundings and assess your troops. To you, the interactive landscape is one huge battlefield, full of traps and advantageous vantage points. Placing your archers on elevated land gives them supremacy over those below, a well-disciplined and correctly formed group of heavy infantry will decimate even the most fearsome of cavalry charges, and splitting your forces in order to flank your opponents is the surest way to victory after you pound down their walls with devastating siege weaponry. You recognise the limitations of heavily armoured knights, their thick visors restricting their line of sight and movement, rendering them virtually useless against a cunningly commanded group of archers. Evincing the subtleties and effectiveness in *WK* of different formations, you use lines to march across land quickly and wedges to cut into densely packed defensive positions, and are immediately aware of similarities to *Battle Realms* as you capture wild horses and place foot-based units on them in order to turn them into cavalry. And as you delve ever further into the game's depths, the battles escalate in size and intensity, pitting hundreds of standard, mythical and mystical creatures against each other in mortal combat.

However, your keen sense of quality also uncovers some irksome errors and glitches. Every now and then, enemy units stand around aimlessly, seemingly conversing with trees while stoically volunteering themselves as life-sized pin cushions for your archers to bury their arrows in. Units can easily become obscured by trees while others sporadically set off in random directions during combat, before inexplicably wading through a pond and stopping in the middle of an adjacent field. And ever so rarely, the gradient-based pathfinding is on the tenuous side. But regardless of these occasional hitches, *Warrior Kings* throws down a stern challenge, one so compulsive and enthralling you can't help but accept. But before you can embrace your destiny, you must build an army and a progressively evolving *Age Of Empires*-like economy (food, wood and gold must all be collected) which can support it. If you think *Warrior Kings* may not be for you after all, then go to the In Perspective box. Otherwise, proceed to Paragraph 100.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICES

PARAGRAPH 1B

Your pathetic machine wheezes in defeat, spitting out the disc in feeble resignation. You must confront your bank manager for a loan. A scrawny man in his late thirties with a suspiciously wild and slightly askew shock of hair, he regards you with a hateful sneer as you speak, before gleefully explaining he can't help you and threatening to have security remove you if you try to object. His gnarled finger is poised to dial. Will you jump up and deliver an arching slap to the top of his head (go to Paragraph 4B) or throw yourself down and beg (go to Paragraph 3B)?

PARAGRAPH 2B

Your love of simplistic patronising strategy games is your undoing. Try as you may, you cannot deal with *WK*'s need for militaristic cunning and detailed strategy, a foreign concept to the isometric mundanity you hold so dear. As you slouch to the floor, you curse your lack of RTS ambition. Your adventure is over...

PARAGRAPH 3B

You realise too late your catastrophic error. Cackling like a crazed hyena, your bank manager kicks you off and mocks you hideously as two suited men drag you round the back to tenderise your skull. Your last thought as you lose consciousness is the knowledge you'll never be able to appreciate this beautiful RTS until you can afford an upgrade. Your adventure is over before it even begins.

PARAGRAPH 4B

Your blow connects with a satisfying thud, and a clump of hair arcs through the air, revealing a flaky pate. The slapped-up banker prostrates himself at your feet in abject humiliation, sporadically thrusting wads of £20 notes into your pocket while begging you not to tell anyone about his shameful secret. Within an hour, you're loading *Warrior Kings* on your brand new PC. Now go to Paragraph 10.

PARAGRAPH 100

After constructing a prosperous farming community filled with trading posts, taverns, storehouses and some barracks, you set about liberating your people from their oppressors, casting aside the usurpers and scattering their flayed bodies around the land like skin confetti. Your perspicacious archers fall back to safer ground when threatened by more powerful units, chasing after retreating foes to cut them down as they flee. As the final village falls, an enemy baron begs for his life, an example of the game's

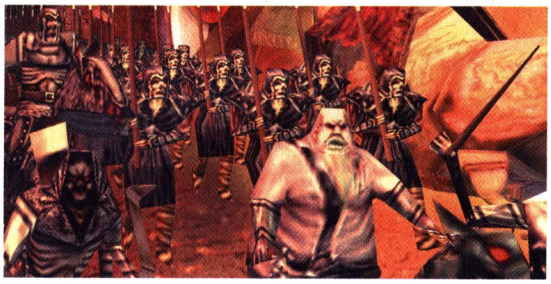
CHOOSING SIDES

You are faced with three choices which will decide your alignment, unit selection and mission set. If you wish to spare the Baron, invite him round for dinner and offer him your sister for the evening, then go to the Imperial paragraph below. If you wish to string the cowardly Baron up from a tree by his own intestines, then go to the Pagan paragraph below. If you're not bothered either way, then go to Renaissance paragraph below.



IMPERIAL

Your benevolent actions have taken you down the Imperial path – one of righteousness, justice and deep religious belief. Cavalry and infantry feature heavily amid a generally more conventional set of units. However, powerful spell-casters and the giant Arch Angel who wields a devastating sword add some extra grunt to a side which excels in the defensive department. The Imperial path can also be mixed with the Renaissance one, allowing wider diversity, but less high-end units. Go to Paragraph 420.



PAGAN

Your unforgiving nature and propensity for evil has taken you down this route. Attack is your strongest asset as you seek to consume all who stand in your way with your collection of grotesque and devastatingly powerful (if slightly slow) units, such as the all-powerful skeletal Abadon warrior and bludgeoning Behemouth. Like the Imperial path, the Pagan one can be mixed with Renaissance. Go to Paragraph 420.

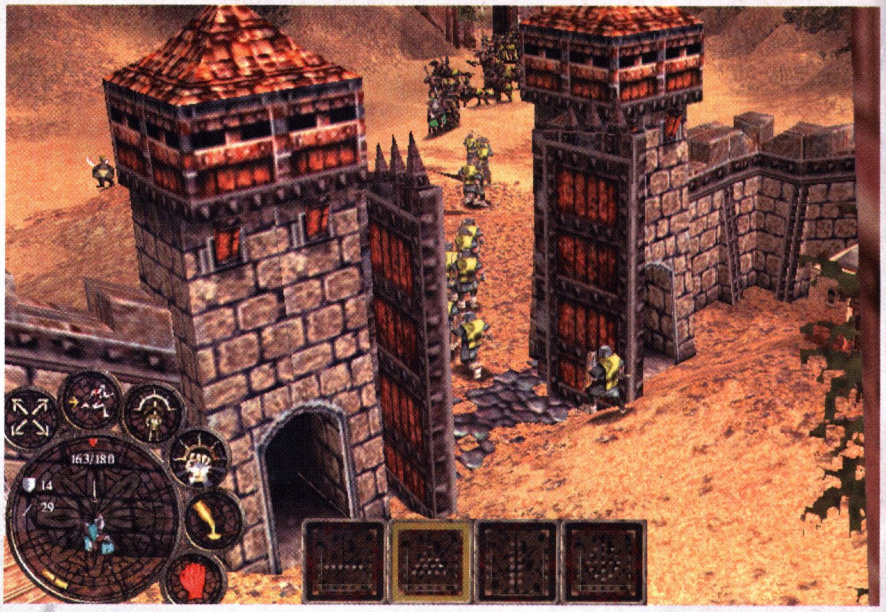


RENAISSANCE

Your indifference to moral issues has taken you down the Renaissance route. You excel in gunpowder-powered weapons and setting up a prosperous trading empire. Go to Paragraph 420.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Multiplayer is another excellent feature in *Warrior Kings*' repertoire, but would have been even better with a *Shogun*-like option where you and an opponent purchase an army each, position troops on a map and battle it out in the open until one side remains victorious. If mutterings from Black Cactus can be believed, this feature may even appear in the pending expansion pack. Here's hoping. Now go to Paragraph 420.





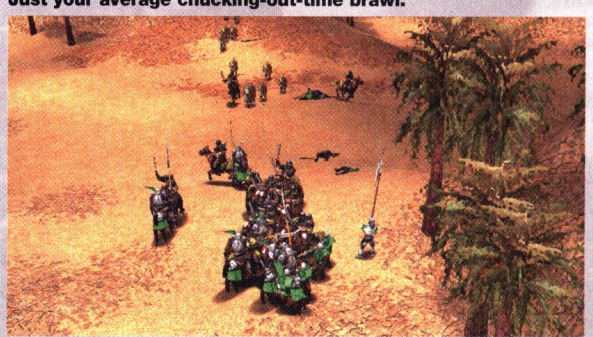
Ten pin bowling... the old fashioned way

branching storyline and tech tree, whereby your actions and choices define what units you can build in future missions, and the direction the plot adopts. You must choose carefully. If you wish to make an alignment choice now by reading up on the three sides on offer, then go to the Choosing Sides panel. If you're worried the game might still be lacking something important, go to the Missed Opportunity box. Otherwise proceed to Paragraph 420.

PARAGRAPH 420

Your journey of discovery is at an end. You have uncovered a stunning RTS, one with a near unparalleled diversity of units and tactics, varied mission goals including heroic prison breaks, sieges and last-stand defences, as well as an intricate economic system and a sublime multiplayer game. But the road is yet long and perilous, full of unexpected and challenging obstacles. If you choose to play on, you'll need tactical cunning, patience and a forgiving nature towards its occasional shortcomings and glitches. Master these, and you'll enjoy one of the deepest, most beautiful, ground-breaking and comprehensive RTS experiences of our time, one with three conclusions to its superbly constructed plot. Fear it, and you'll be running like a coward back to something simpler and far less satisfying. PCZ

Just your average chucking-out-time brawl.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Stunning graphics
- ✔ Massive unit and mission diversity
- ✔ Superbly interactive and tactical landscapes
- ✔ Excellent story
- ✘ Annoying glitches and bugs
- ✘ Too complex for some

90

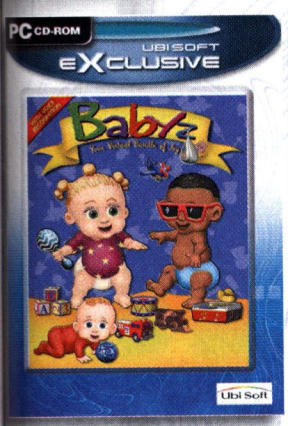
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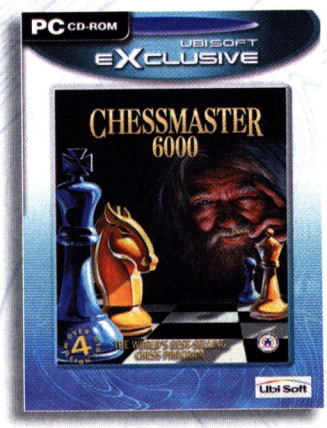
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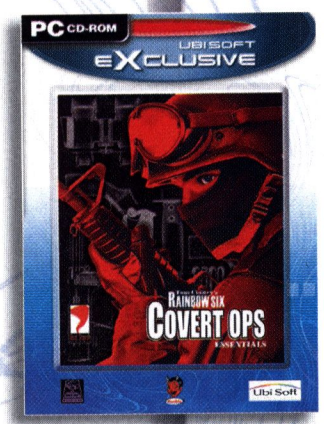
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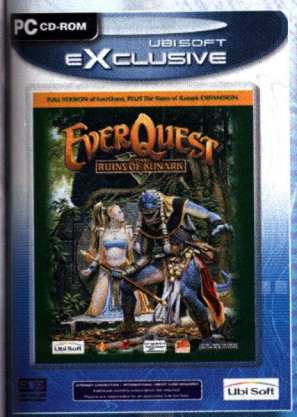


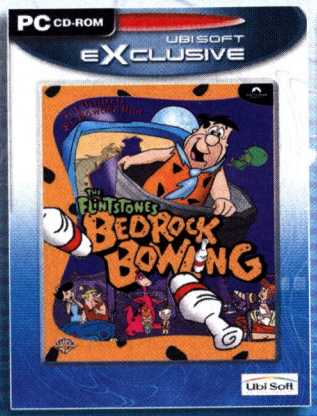


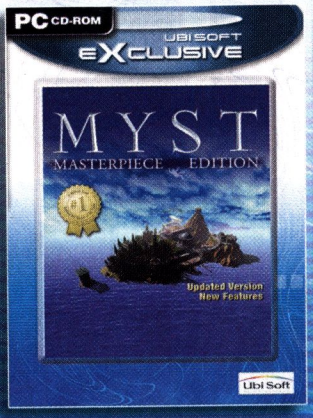


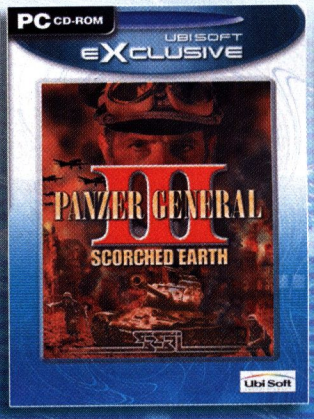


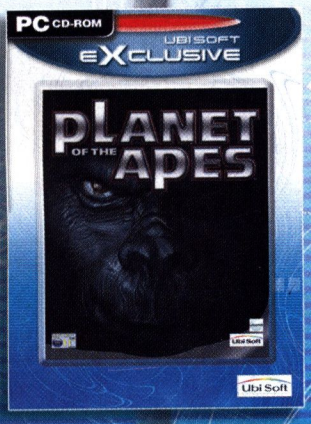
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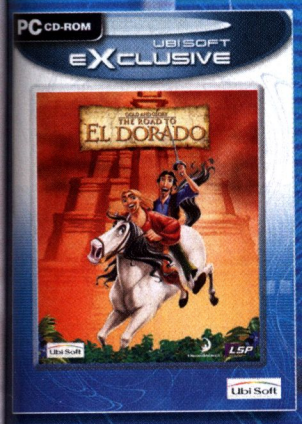


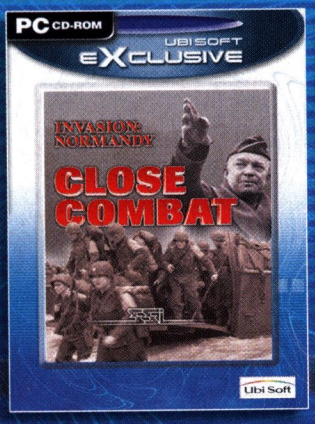




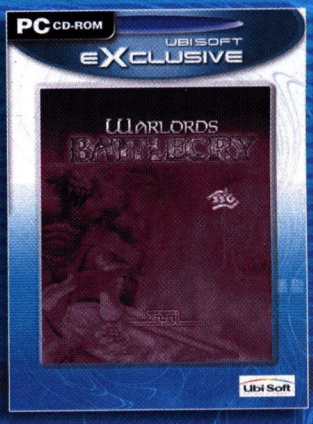


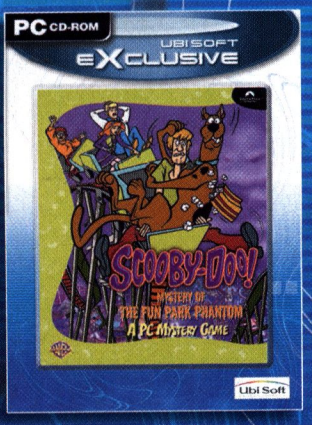
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"the best shooter on PC"

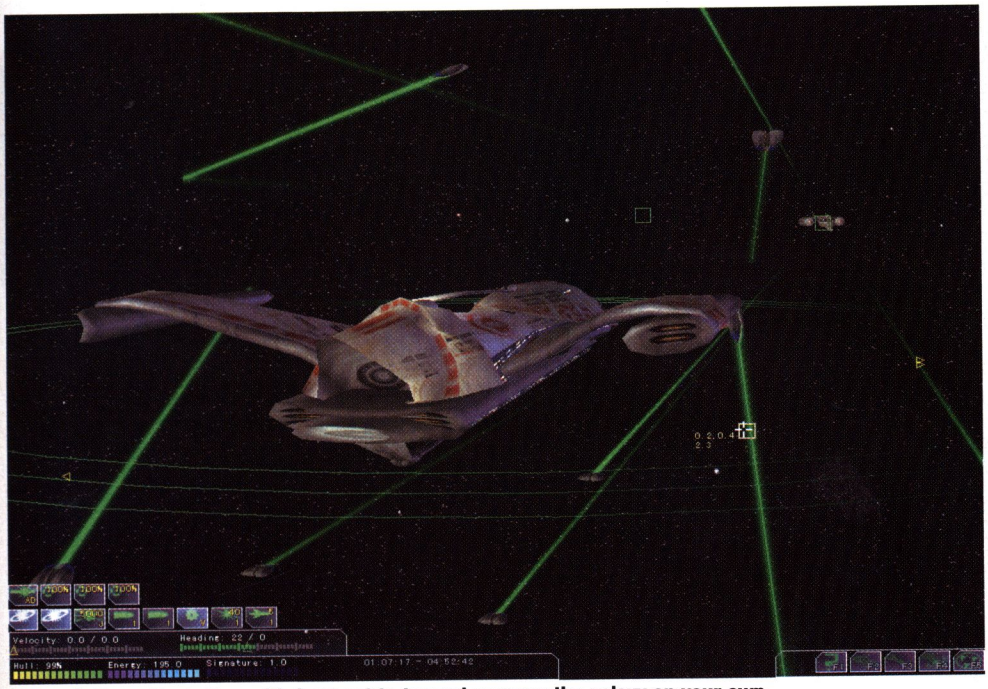
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Although the option's there, it's best not to try and conquer the galaxy on your own.

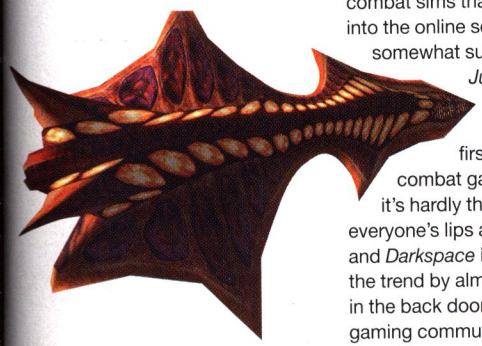
DARKSPACE

■ US$9.99 per month | Dev: Palestar | ETA: Now | Web: darkspace.net

REQUIRES PII 300, 64Mb RAM, 56k modem and a 4Mb 3D card **DESIRES** 128Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card and an ADSL connection

Space combat, resource management, killing things in the face and *Chris Anderson*. *Darkspace* has it all

ONLINE ONLY



IT SAYS A LOT

about the popularity of space combat sims that their entry into the online scene has been somewhat subdued. *Jumpgate* is a highly accomplished first-person space combat game online, but it's hardly the name on everyone's lips at the moment, and *Darkspace* is continuing the trend by almost sneaking in the back door of the online gaming community, its presence largely unannounced. Unlike *Jumpgate*, however, *Darkspace* adopts a third-person perspective view, so in this respect it has more in common with games such as *Homeworld* than the multitude of *Elite* clones currently on offer on the PC gaming scene.

Your objective in the game is dependant largely on which server you choose to play on. There are three faction choices available (two human and one alien), and if you choose an open server your objective is to take control of the entire galaxy, alone (which let's face it is not going to happen) or as part of a player-made clan, of which there are many. Alternatively, you can log on to a mission server and follow a predefined scenario to its logical conclusion.

Capturing planets is the key to success.



BUILD AND DESTROY

You will spend most of your time in *Darkspace* either capturing planets and building defences on them, or seeking out enemy planets and attempting a takeover bid. Capture the key planets in a given sector, and the sector in question will be controlled by your clan. In order to progress through the game successfully, you will obviously need bigger and better spaceships. You can get these when you acquire enough prestige points to take control of superior ships (ie experience points). Capture enough planets, for example, and you will go up in rank in this particular area and have more options available to you as a result.

Those then, are the basics of *Darkspace*. It all sounds so simple, and in practice it is. While there are certain tactical elements to combat (the use of ECM and cloaking or laying mines in strategic locations), *Darkspace*, when all is said and done, is a fairly simplistic affair. Because the action is played out from a third-person perspective, you control your ship via a mouse, and if it wasn't for the likes of the cloaking device, this part of the game would be little more than a point-and-shoot affair.

GETTING TOGETHER

The player community is a healthy one: this is perhaps due to the design of the game which dictates that players rely heavily on other people in their clan for supplies and resources. The graphics are functional if unspectacular, and gameplay is reasonably engrossing for a few days at least. However, if you're looking for the game that's going to wake up the online community to the delights of the space combat genre, *Darkspace* is not the one to do it. PW

IN PERSPECTIVE

JUMPGATE
Reviewed Issue 107
This first-person *Elite*-style trading game is probably the best online space combat sim to date.

EDGE OF CHAOS: INDEPENDENCE WAR II
Reviewed Issue 104
Massively engrossing freeform single-player space combat epic with a twist-ridden storyline.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Low system specs
- ✔ Easy to play and advance your character
- ✔ Stat-phobes will love it
- ✘ Cumbersome chat interface
- ✘ What you see is what you get
- ✘ Simplistic combat

65

Great player community, average game



New maps are constantly being added and a new playable race should be available, about now.




Zoom in, zoom out, shake it all about... turn around (etc etc).

LASER SQUAD NEMESIS

■ US$15 per six months | Dev: Codo Games | ETA: Out Now | Web: www.lasersquadnemesis.com | Players: 2

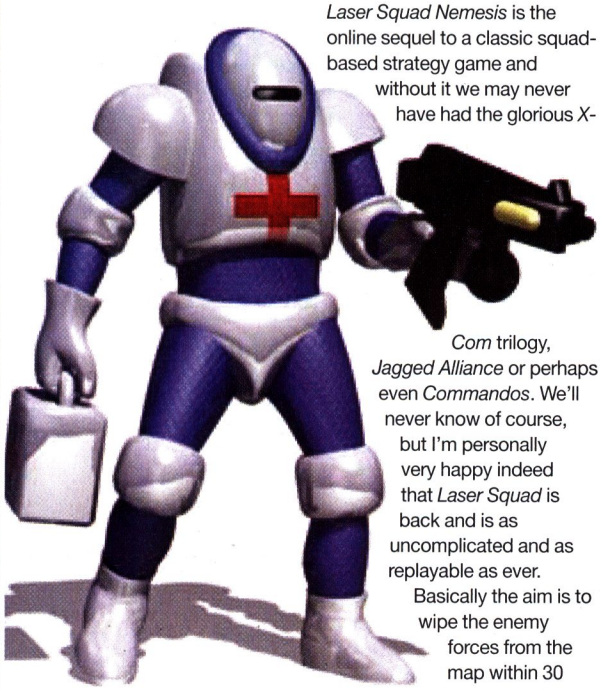
REQUIRES PII 233, 64Mb RAM, Internet access **DESIRES** Two cards: one with 3D graphics, the other without a credit limit

***Richie Shoemaker* finds a game you can play between meals without ruining your appetite**

ONLINE ONLY

IN PERSPECTIVE

EMAIL X-COM
Axed a year ago, it was fun while it lasted, which wasn't long.
ROBOFORGE
Reviewed Issue 111
Robot Wars, played by email. Hardcore stuff, but quite a bit of fun.



AH, YES, *Laser Squad*. Brings back fond memories of squealing tape recorders and trying to shield the screen from prying opponents. Played it for hours, so much so that it probably caused me to fail my A level Geography. Or maybe that was because I couldn't be arsed revising, whatever.

But I'm not here to talk about the past, especially mine. All you need to know for now is that *Laser Squad Nemesis* is the online sequel to a classic squad-based strategy game and without it we may never have had the glorious *X-Com* trilogy, *Jagged Alliance* or perhaps even *Commandos*. We'll never know of course, but I'm personally very happy indeed that *Laser Squad* is back and is as uncomplicated and as replayable as ever.

Basically the aim is to wipe the enemy forces from the map within 30 turns, or at least kill more of your enemy than he does of your troops. Subscribers enter an email address to send a challenge, and when someone accepts, you both spend your 20 force points on a mix of units and place them on the map. Marine commanders can choose from the usual range of grunts, snipers, medics and grenade-lobbers, while the '50s B-movie Mechanoids have scanners, hunters and a couple of lumbering tanks. Unlike *X-Com* or even the original game, you can't equip your troops at all, but at least a third race, The Spawn, are due to make an appearance soon, if they haven't done so already.

TAKE YOUR TIME

And so to battle. It's all done via email of course, which allows for simultaneous play, with games that can last as little as an afternoon if your opponent is having a lazy day at work, or they can stretch for weeks. Once you get the turn sent to you, simply watch the last turn (10 seconds), plan your next moves, test them out and send them in via the magic of email and wait for the results to come in. Repeat to fade. Not much to it really.

Which would be pretty poor if you'd spent £30 pounds on the game. Thankfully *LSN* is ridiculously cheap – just over £1.50 a month if you can't be arsed to work it out for yourself, and free for those who receive a challenge from a subscriber since challengees don't have to pay. Moreover, despite the fact the game is rather shallow in terms of features, it is perfectly suited to the play-by-email format, much like chess is. But if you're thinking *LSN* is just a glorified online board game, think again. The video-style replays and test options are genius: you can if you so wish watch a game from start to inevitable end, pore over missed opportunities and learn from your many mistakes. The test option lets you run through your current orders, seeing how the next move might be played out and is incredibly useful, despite the dice-rolling nature of combat. The graphics, while not spectacular, are more than just functional *Civilization*-style models. You can zoom in and out of the map and the animation is more than adequate.

NAPPY RASH

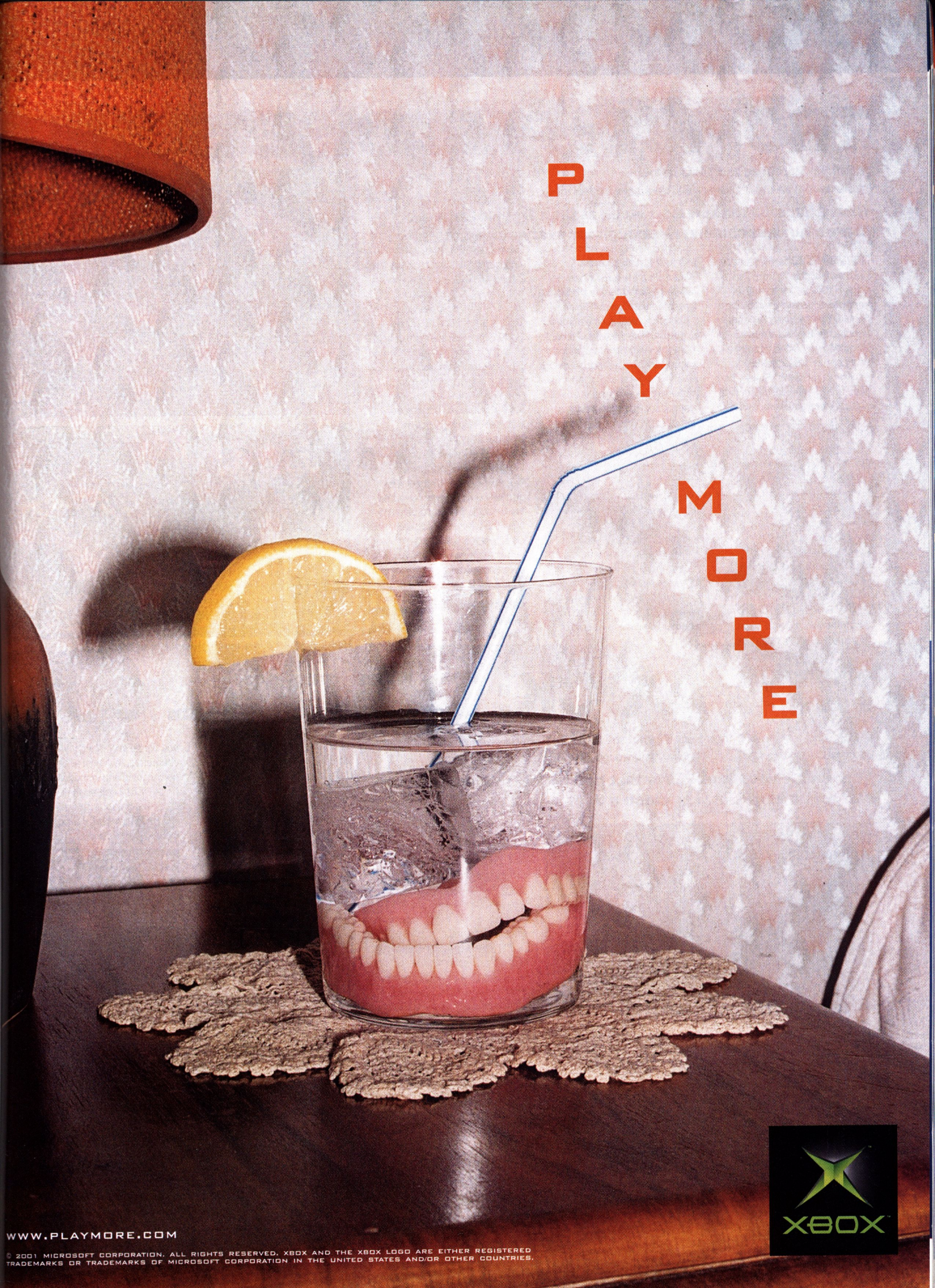
Currently, *LSN* is going through the usual newborn phase all online games go through; charming the pants off everyone who plays it and occasionally crying and messing its nappy (you can only open doors by shooting at them for instance), but the good news is that it won't be long before it's cooing and pulling itself up to stand. Evolution will be rapid, we are told, with new units, maps and options set to be added on a regular basis, along with campaign modes and a single-player game. No doubt by the end of your first subscription period the game will boast many more features than it has currently, but for now it's the perfect game to play in between bouts of Net surfing and more serious game playing. If you're not sure, hit the game forums and get someone to challenge you. I guarantee you'll be pleasantly surprised. PCZ

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Very, very cheap
- ✔ Simple, challenging and addictive
- ✔ Has a bright future
- ✘ Not much there at the moment
- ✘ Teething problems

73

Early days, but the forecast is good



WWW.PLAYMORE.COM

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TROPICO: PARADISE ISLAND

■ £19.99 | Pub: Take 2 | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES P200, 32Mb RAM, a copy of Tropico **DESIRES** PII 450, 128Mb RAM, 3D card

***Richie Shoemaker* spends a week at Club *Tropico*, where there's fun and sunshine – enough for everyone, apparently**

TROPICO really could have been a great game. The signs initially looked pretty impressive: take the established *SimCity* formula and make it a hundred times more interesting, by putting you at the head of a very corrupt government on a small tropical island. Rather than plan roads, industrial, residential and commercial sectors with little or no purpose, *Tropico* promised a real edge; the peasants could revolt at any moment, the army may rise up against you, or any number of extreme groups would demonstrate against your unwillingness to embrace communism, capitalism, or other forms of religious fundamentalism and tyranny. However, while you could imprison or execute your political enemies, you had to rely on a rather inept police force. Where were the secret police and their torture chambers? Where were the army when you needed them? More to the point, where were the coca fields?

Unfortunately, as the name suggests, *Paradise Island* takes *Tropico* further down the more socially acceptable path, offering much more for those who would prefer to pander to the needs of 'yanqui' tourists than those who'd rather attach electrodes to the genitals of their citizens. As such you get about 14 new buildings that cater exclusively for tourists, a couple for your people to enjoy, an army base and new presidential laws such as conscription and social security. The phrase 'more of the same' has never been more apt.

For those of you who were disappointed with *Tropico*'s handful of missions, the good news is that *Paradise Island* adds another 20 scenarios, some of which are actually rather entertaining. However, with a few interface tweaks and changes to constructions and elections, the best of what *Paradise Island* has to offer feels more like a patch update than a proper expansion. There is so much more that could have been added; drug dealing, multiplayer, proper military options – the list of what we would have liked to have seen included is almost endless. Unfortunately though, what we have ended up with is an Andrew Ridgely to mime alongside *Tropico*'s George Michael. The add-on complements the game well enough, but you'd be better off without it for what little it adds to the original game.

PCZONE VERDICT 63

Another missed opportunity





Holidays don't come much cheaper than this.

HITCHCOCK: THE FINAL CUT

■ £29.99 | Dev: Arxel Tribe | Pub: Wanadoo | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 333, 64Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card **DESIRES** 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card

The trouble with *Mark Hill* is that he's young and innocent, but at least he knows how to catch a thief





Dull graphics and dull gameplay make this a very dull game.

AN ADVENTURE game based around the works of Alfred Hitchcock sounds like an intriguing proposition, until you realise the developer is French/Slovenian and the fat director's influence amounts to stolen scenes and familiar settings.

The concept is ingenious enough: you're a PI hired to investigate the disappearance of a millionaire who is obsessed with Hitchcock, and who had been shooting a film based on the director's works on his estate. His house is straight out of *Psycho* and the film sets are from the likes of *Torn Curtain* and *Vertigo*. But there is a fundamental difference between the celebrated director's work and this game that is apparent from the beginning. The script – what little there is of it – is piss-poor, and the acting just a notch above abominable (just wait until you hear the awful screeching of the talking bird). In common with other notorious European adventure titles, the main character is a total tit who thinks he's Sam Spade.

The few good ideas here are sabotaged by talentless execution. You do get glimpses of extracts from *Hitchcock*'s films, thanks to the PI's psychic powers, but the rest is too ham-fisted to work. The puzzles range from obvious to ridiculous and you hardly ever interact with other characters, making it all very heavy going and immediately boring. Still, I confess it does mean the dreadful dialogue is kept to a minimum. For puzzle-starved gamers only.

PCZONE VERDICT 30

Feed it to The Birds



This is about as exciting as this game gets.







Dig through the dirt and pump the Pookas.

DIG DUG DEEPER

■ £9.99 | Pub: Infogrames | ETA: Out Now

EVERY now and again Infogrames re-release an old arcade classic. Some are so bad you wish it hadn't bothered, others leave you shrugging with indifference. *Dig Dug Deeper* is one of the latter, although the pocket-friendly price makes it worth a cursory glance.

The original (dig through levels and pump Pookas and Fygars until they explode) was quirky but overrated, particularly when you put it up against the similarly themed *Mr Do*. Unfortunately, 20 years of progress seems to consist of a new breed of Pooka that takes ten pumps to kill rather than four. OK, there are a couple of other additions, but the gameplay's the same, the character movement problematic and the overall experience way too short. (*DW*)

PCZONE VERDICT 51

SOLARIS 1.0.4.

■ £9.99 | Pub: Akaei | ETA: March 8

AS decidedly average as this game is, there's a bit of conflict for us in declaring it a complete tragedy, as in a way we're glad that scrolling arcade shooters are still being made for the PC. Commonly cited examples such as *Star Monkey* prove that there's still life in the genre, but bland *R-Type/Scramble* clones such as this only weaken the argument for twitch gaming, however pretty it may be. Recurring problems such as an unnecessarily chaotic playfield, an unsatisfying power-up curve, and the use of confusing 2.5D planes that see you crashing into environmental objects assumed to be 'background' are frustrating, but the game's biggest failing is in being just plain dull. You need look no further than the pages of Emu Zone for infinitely more entertaining examples of this timeless strain of gameplay, although to be fair, it is less than a tenner. (*AH*)

PCZONE VERDICT 55



Left, right, up, down and fire – retro-style shooting.



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RAVEN ACTIVISION

CAPITALISM II

■ £29.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Enlight Software | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 233 64Mb RAM **DESIRES** PII 350, 128Mb RAM and a 3D card

Steve O'Hagan finds out about niche markets

THIS is the game to give Fidel Castro enough reason to make PCs in Cuba illegal if he hasn't already. On the other hand, its dog-eat-dog message that profitability is everything would make Bill Gates applaud, before producing a similar product to muscle it out of the market.

Your task is to make as much money as possible as CEO of an international corporation. You have to negotiate booms and recessions, deal with your workforce, invest in R&D, but above all, keep things profitable. Starting from a humble supermarket, you buy, sell, hire and advertise your way to the top of the pile.

It's easy enough to use, though tricky to beat. Having a business degree will help, though with reams of data to analyse, scores of menus to negotiate, and aggressively competitive AI, you'll still be up against it.

It looks far better than its predecessors *Capitalism* and *Capitalism Gold*. A *SimCity* style view shows where everything is, but has little influence on the game, which boils down to a series of graphs and flow-charts.

It's a competent sim, but its biggest failing is its subject matter. Dealing with balance sheets and profitability graphs are things most would rather leave at work, and recreating the market economy of the Thatcher years will make anyone with a leftist bone in their body run a mile.

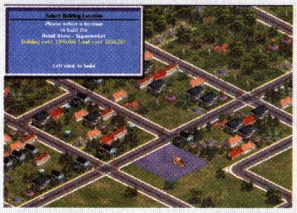
Karl Marx may well be turning in his grave as he sees people playing this, but in the end he will agree with its lesson – Capitalism is ultimately unrewarding.

PCZONE VERDICT 52

Like doing an economics exam

Keep tabs on your rivals' progress.





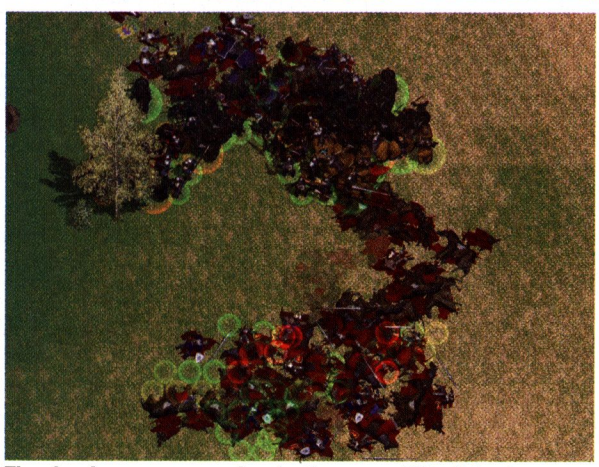






Although they look pretty similar, you can be based in cities across the world. This is Rome.





The visuals are messy and make the game difficult to play.

DEMONWORLD II

■ £29.99 | Pub: Xicat | Dev: Ikarion | ETA: March 1

REQUIRES P200, 16Mb RAM **DESIRES** PII 300, 32Mb RAM and a 3D card

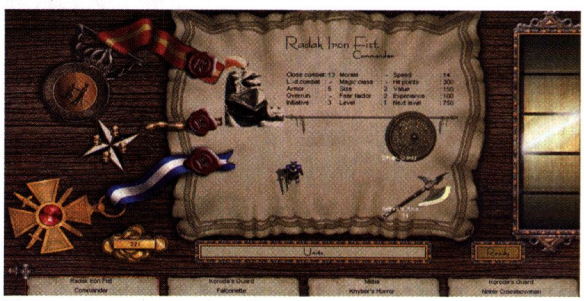
"Orcs! Get your Orcs here!" *Keith Pullin* flogs an ugly mutant

HYBRID games rarely work and here we have a classic example of why. Lurking somewhere between RPG and RTS *Demonworld II* suffers from a massive identity crisis. Excelling in neither genre it comes across as lost and bewildered.

At first the variety and detail seem impressive, and to an extent it is, as you immerse yourself in numerous unit types and their strategic strengths and weaknesses. There are dozens of infantry, mounted and magical units to choose from, each boasting an impressive list of attributes such as close quarters combat, ranged attacks and fear factor. Unfortunately, once you get on the battlefield it's a graphical nightmare telling them apart, so the whole system collapses because you don't know which unit you're selecting.

And talking about selecting units, the interface is woefully inefficient. Once a unit has moved you have to reselect it before issuing another command. There are also too many mouse clicks involved in getting magicians, priests and ballista to attack. In fact, most of the game seems to involve right and left clicking like a maniac while seemingly nothing happens.

On top of its other failings there's just one campaign and a dozen or so individual missions. There are also 24 multiplayer maps but we never got to experience those because the server was constantly off-line. In short *Demonworld II* is spectacularly bland and at times quite hard to play. If you want a stylish fantasy RTS with a hint of RPG we suggest *Battle Realms.*



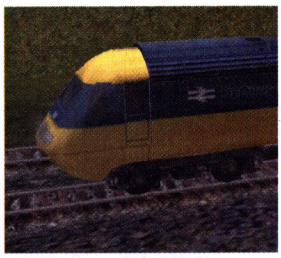
The excellent range of attributes for each unit is about the only decent part of the game.

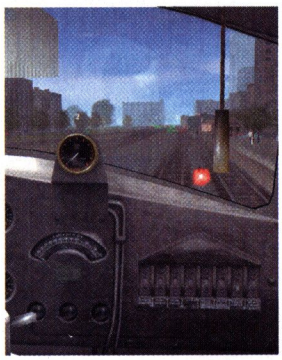
PCZONE VERDICT 39

Spectacularly bland and highly frustrating



The game model railway enthusiasts have been dreaming about.





TRAINZ

■ £29.99 | Pub: Auran | ETA: Out Now

QUITE why I've suddenly become the office expert on train sims I don't know, but I suppose someone has to do it. Anyway, following Microsoft's hyped simulation several months ago, now we find ourselves with a more low-key affair from an Aussie bunch called Auran. Not actually a train sim, but a *model* train sim. So the genre narrows.

To be honest it's everything you'd expect it to be. Build your own train sets from the wide choice of carriages available, construct a track in the scenery editor (or use one of the pre-built maps) then drive them round and round in circles, using either a simple speed knob or a pretty accurate 'simulation' mode.

And that's it. It looks nice, plays well enough, and Auran promises plenty of add-ons on its website. But if you're not already into train sets you won't find anything that'll make you clear space in your attic. One for the devotees only. *(PP)*

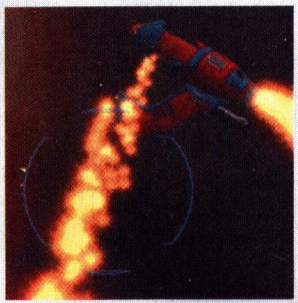
PCZONE VERDICT 68

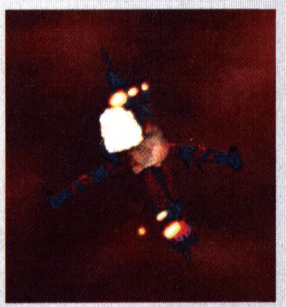
HALCYON SUN

■ £14.99 | Pub: Singularity Software | ETA: March 30

REMEMBER Freeloader.com? No? That's probably because it went under faster than Lisa Riley in a diving pool. *Halcyon Sun* was one of its so-called great ideas to get you coming back to its website time and time again, a free downloadable episodic space combat game with a wholly forgettable storyline. You know the score. A conflict rages between two rival factions, blah blah, you're a square-jawed squadron leader blah blah, fighting for survival blaaaaaah. Still, at least the cut-scenes are generally well presented, and once the action kicks off, *Halcyon Sun* becomes a fairly entertaining affair, although some ropey sound effects and unimpressive-looking weapons do detract from the at times frantic arcade-like action. It may not be free anymore, but at £15 it's still vaguely good value, especially as it negates the need for downloading each episode, which as Freeloader proved, is not the best way to get hold of your games. *(MK)*

PCZONE VERDICT 48





This game is neither Halcyon nor is it particularly sunny.



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ACTIVISION.

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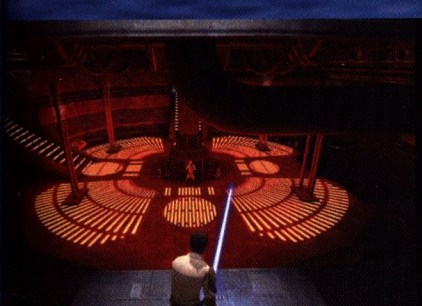


S A JEDI KNIGHT YOUR WEAPONS ARE
EACE, KNOWLEDGE AND DEVOTION.

H YES, AND YOUR VERY OWN LIGHTSABER.

STAR WARS™ JEDI KNIGHT™ II: JEDI OUTCAST™

he legacy of *Star Wars*™ **Dark Forces**™ and *Star Wars* **edi Knight: Dark Forces II** lives on in **Jedi Outcast** ith epic single and multi-player first-person action set n the *Star Wars* universe. As fallen Jedi Kyle Katarn, you ust wield your enhanced lightsaber and arsenal of eaponry to invoke the power of the Force. You cannot un away from your destiny. To know the light, you must ee the dark.









REPLAY

Some of the best things in life are free – others are available at a budget price



Captain Shoemaker bravely leads from the rear.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT – GOLD EDITION

■ £29.99 | Pub: Codemasters | ETA: Out Now

A couple of months shy of being a year old, *Operation Flashpoint* remains the best first-person war simulation available. It isn't quite as user-friendly as *Ghost Recon*, but for all its graphical rough edges, stilted dialogue and overlong cut-scenes, the fact that you can command tanks, jeeps, helicopters and fighters, not to mention get lost among some huge maps, proves just how impressive the game is. Even more remarkable however, is how dedicated developer Bohemia Interactive is when it comes to supporting the game. Since the original game was released four massive upgrades have been unleashed, between them not only fixing a number of bugs, but adding new vehicles, weapons, single and multiplayer missions as well as multiplayer modes. The first three upgrades are combined as part of the *Red Hammer* campaign (available on its own to download from www.codemasters.com for £4.99), the fourth you'll find on this month's discs.

So for the cash you get the original game, the upgrades, a mini strategy guide and the *Red Hammer* disc, which for those that may have missed the game first time around, represents rather good value for money. The *Red Hammer* campaign incidentally adds no new weapons or vehicles, rather it offers players the chance to fight a prolonged campaign for the other side. It's a tricky set of missions for sure, even for battle-hardened veterans like us. Saying that, with a full-blown expansion pack due in the summer and the very promising *Operation Vietnam* mod in development, there's plenty of life left in the game. So sign up now, your country needs you.

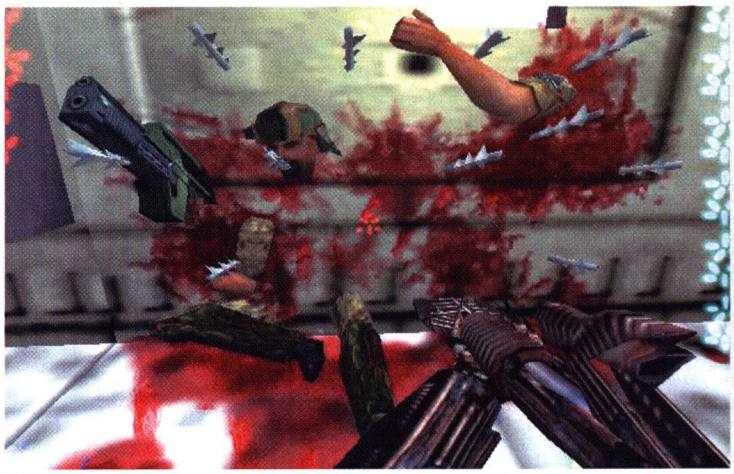
Richie Shoemaker

A classic then and a classic now.





PCZONE VERDICT 90



Now we're not experts, but that's gotta hurt.

ALIENS VS PREDATOR – GOLD EDITION

■ £9.99 | Pub: Sierra Best Sellers | ETA: Out Now

Compared to the recent sequel from US-based Monolith, the original *AvP* from UK studio Rebellion hasn't dated too badly all things considered. It's the same old trio of Marine, Alien and Predator mini-campaigns, and though here they each lack the cohesive storyline of the sequel, the game remains just as tense and no less frightening. If you want to exercise the old sphincter and can't afford *AvP2*, it's a fairly good buy, but it has to be said *AvP2* is a far more polished game on the whole.

The Gold Edition of this oldie basically adds a few extra multiplayer levels – none of which you'll ever play online, plus the save-game feature that was criminally left out of the original release. For a tenner there's a couple of days' play for those determined enough to plough through what are essentially the same missions, but you can't put a price on scares and *AvP Gold* has plenty of them.

Richie Shoemaker

PCZONE VERDICT 65

ZEUS: MASTER OF OLYMPUS

■ £9.99 | Pub: VU Games Best Seller Series | ETA: Out Now

As god games go, *Zeus* is still up there with the best of them. An intricate and infuriatingly addictive meld of strategy and micro-management, *Zeus* installs you as the head of an ancient Greek city, which you must build up both economically and militarily, while keeping your punchably cutesey citizens content with a collection of intellectual and sordid diversions. As is the norm in any god game, you've also got to contend with the usual quota of natural disasters and enemies intent on wiping out your male population while forcefully inseminating your womenfolk. *Zeus*' daunting complexity is considerably diluted by a collection of informative and easy-to-follow tutorials, which will have even the simplest of mongs getting to grips with the game's intricacies in no time. However, *Zeus* is let down by a number of major niggles, including the absence of random maps and multiplayer, while the combat system is limited and virtually bereft of tactical options. Let's face it, it's no *Black & White*, but it's still one of the best god games on the PC. And that's the bottom line.



Clacton-on-Sea.



Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT 83

TRIBES II

■ £9.99 | Pub: VU Games Best Seller Series | ETA: Out Now



Now that's a gun.

One of the biggest titles in online gaming now has one of the smallest prices. *Tribes II* and its predecessor entertain 400,000 players every month, and although outgunned by perennial favourite *Half-Life* in the popularity league, it still provides team gamers with perhaps the most undiluted experience on offer. If you've yet to make the jump from *Tribes* to *Tribes II*, the latter's recent move into budget territory means you get an additional alien species, highly detailed landscapes, a slick new interface, massively improved visuals and decent shooters for under a tenner.

Tribes II retains the features that made the first so good, including lag-free gameplay, manned vehicles, 64-player maps, three classes of armour. Maps the size of Nebraska bring buckets of atmosphere to the proceedings, as do those famously vast fortresses sulking behind a haze on the horizon. Additions of note include an integrated browser and mail client, making the organisation of clan matches a breeze, as well as single-player missions. Although bots play with a certain determination, the game was never intended to be played solo and multiplayer remains the better experience.

Tribes II doesn't make it to the class above but remains a class apart. At £9.99, it's a steal.

Phil Wand

PCZONE VERDICT 87

DELTA FORCE 2/ ROGUE SPEAR

■ £14.99 | Pub: Novalogic | ETA: Out Now

These two ageing action/strategy shooters are bundled together to form one fairly enticing tactical ops-based package. *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear*, to give it its full name, is the superior of the two, and throws you and your squad of elite multinational special operatives into an array of missions in which you have to thwart terrorists from either blowing something important up, or stringing up innocent hostages by their thumbs and slapping them around the soles of their feet with cables. *Delta Force 2* bases its set of covert operative missions on much the same themes, only this time you control one soldier, rather than a team of them. Both offer detailed soldier set-up screens, with some of the world's deadliest and most hi-tech weaponry at your disposal.

Stealth, forward-planning and an accurate shot are essential throughout. *Rogue Spear* provides slightly more suspense of the two with its often claustrophobic and intricately designed levels. Both are well past their prime and look a bit rough round the edges, but they'll have you clamming up at the armpit with suspense, nonetheless.

Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT 70



EVERQUEST: RUINS OF KUNARK

■ £9.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | ETA: Out Now


Hellooooo...

It would seem that after we ran the full version of *EverQuest* back in issue 112 of *ZONE*, along with a free two-week trial, an entire legion of you became hooked and started asking where you could pick up a copy of the excellent add-on pack *Ruins Of Kunark*. Ubi Soft, bless 'em, couldn't tell us, which is rather worrying when you consider they publish the game and all of its add-on packs. And as if that wasn't comical enough, despite their apparent lack of knowledge they placed an ad in the same issue featuring a selection of imminent Ubi Soft re-releases, one of which was, you guessed it, *Ruins Of Kunark*. Bless 'em.

So here it is, offering you endless weeks of gamplay or simply some new locales (a whole new continent in fact, with more than 20 new zones) in which to indulge in banalities with your clan mates. Whatever way you look at it though, it's an impressive package, crammed full of new features such as allowing you to attain higher levels of experience as well as providing a revamp of the graphics and animations. If you're already hooked on *EverQuest*, *Kunark* will give you just the fix you're after at a criminally low price.

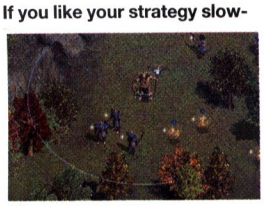
Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT 80

LEFTOVERS

PLEASE SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE SIR...

On a tighter budget than a married man? A married man? Then you're going to want to know what else is out there to spend your weekly allowance on – and this month we've got quite a collection. First off is *Warlords: Battlecry* (£9.99), which attempts to take the compulsiveness of its turn-based predecessors and convert it into a real-time experience. Unfortunately it fails. Tragically, however, it offers plenty of RPG elements and is a bit of fun despite being eminently forgettable... What was I talking about again? Oh yeah, 60 per cent. Next up is *Panzer General III: Scorched Earth* (£9.99). This is one for all you forgiving turn-based fans out there who can ignore the fact it's almost identical to the previous one. If you like your strategy slow-paced and have an unhealthy love of WWII, then it's worth a punt, otherwise: avoid (60 per cent). Then there's the immensely comprehensive and massively challenging *Chessmaster 6000* which, for a mere tenner, is excellent value, and warrants a very well-deserved 70 per cent.


Warlords Battlecry

The less said about the risible and mind-numbingly dull static screen adventures *Myst: Masterpiece Edition* (35 per cent) and *Riven* (40 per cent) the better.


Panzer General III: SE

Interesting, isn't it, that action/adventure *Planet Of The Apes*, which was only released as a full-priced game four months ago (and just happened to coincide with the film), is now available for a tenner? Or perhaps it's not that interesting at all, seeing as it's about as entertaining as pissing arsenic. (35 per cent). You decide.


Riven

To wrap things up there's the distinctly average *Pro Rally 2001* (£9.99), which hardly deserves a passing thought considering *Colin McCrae 2* is also available at a budget price, (50 per cent). Saving the worst till last (because I'm nice like that), we're subjected to *The Flintstones: Bedrock Bowling* (10 per cent) – that's one quid for every percentage mark – which is so basic it would patronise a dropped baby, despite its £9.99 price tag. And that's about your lot.


Pro Rally 2001

UPDATES

A place for single-player redemption and multiplayer action

"The shops that sell weapons, armour and items are still as useless as they ever were"

MULTIPLE CHANCES

What's all this about then?

Some PC games are exceptionally flaky on release, with bugs and ommissions that are subsequently fixed over time with patches. When this happens we'll take another look and see if the score is worth upping.By the same token, massively multiplayer games are ever-evolving and because of this we'll be re-visiting major relases to see what's changed over time. This is also the place where we take a proper look at the multiplayer side of games. As we regularly review games before they go on sale, there are no public sevrers up and running. Instead of telling you how we think the game is going to play we'll wait and do a proper multiplayer review here, outlining how many servers are up and how the game plays online.

ANARCHY ONLINE V1.5

ON THE DVD ■ US$12 per month | Dev: Funcom | ETA: Out Now | Web: www.anarchy-online.com | Players: No limit

ONLINE ONLY

REQUIRES PII 300, 128Mb RAM, 3D card, 28.8K modem **DESIRES** PIII 450, 16MB RAM, ADSL connection

Six months on, the world of *Anarchy Online* has matured. *Chris Anderson* goes in search of the game that was promised on release

WHEN we first looked at this game six months ago, it was rife with problems. Horrible lag, texture overloads, bugs, you name it, *Anarchy Online* had it. Despite this, it still managed to chalk up a surprisingly respectable score, due largely to its innovative approach to what is fast becoming an established genre, and the massive potential it had which was evident even upon its initial release.

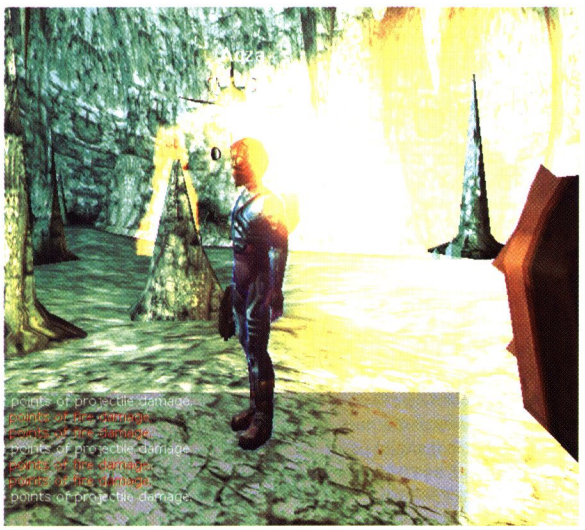
Coming back to the game after six months, the good news is that most of the problems listed above have been eliminated, but what about the game proper? We had a checklist of 'fixes' and design faults that we wanted to see addressed, and went through them all methodically.



Outdoor team hunting is still action-packed and frenetic, which is where *AO* beats *EQ*.

The Rompa bar, a new place for people to 'hang out'.





PATIENCE WEARING THIN

First up is the mission design. For those of you who are unfamiliar with *Anarchy Online*, the game features missions in place of quests. Go to a mission booth and you have a long list of missions of varying difficulty, which offer rewards based on how hard they are to complete. When the game was initially reviewed, the missions were very repetitive. Mission environments were all very similar, and the layouts quite simplistic. The problem is, *AO* forces you to do these missions if you are to accumulate a reasonable amount of money in the game. The bad news is missions are still as dull as they ever were, and without a complete redesign it's difficult to see how Funcom is ever going to make this aspect of the game work as was originally intended. There are plans to make missions more 'interesting', but we don't have details as to what that entails yet. The question is, how long does Funcom expect people to wait?

HAPPY SHOPPER

Acquiring items in the game is still largely reliant on using the shopping channels. The shops that sell weapons, armour and items are still as useless as ever (you can't simply go to a shop and buy the correct items for your level, all items are still randomly generated) so you have to go to the shopping channel and hope players are selling the things you need. There is a new function in the channel where you can place items for sale when you're not online for other players to buy. The shopbot will also show you what's on offer from other players. This is a reasonable compromise, but we would much rather go to the stores in Rubi-ka and buy what we need with the credits accumulated from doing countless missions.

The infamous storyline has kicked off, but nobody seems to care much about it. The ongoing struggle between Omnitec and the Clans is illustrated on the website, and story events happen within the game, but the story seems to be running alongside the game as opposed to being player-driven (which is what was originally promised).

There have been numerous interface enhancements and there are now a few static dungeons (but nowhere near enough), and although the game is still laggy, it's a lot better than it was. But, aside from bug fixes, *Anarchy Online* as it stands is pretty much the same as it was six months ago apart from a few design tweaks here and there, and for that reason the score remains much the same. PCZ

PCZONE VERDICT	
ORIGINAL SCORE	80
PATCHED SCORE	82
Almost the same as it ever was...	

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN MULTIPLAYER

■ £29.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Nerve | ETA: Out Now | Web: www.activision.com | Players: 1-32

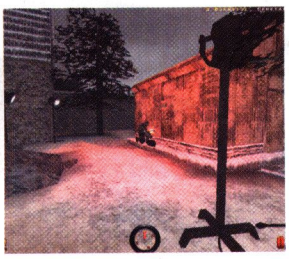
REQUIRES PII 400, 128Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card and a 56K modem **DESIRES** P4 1.2Ghz, 32Mb graphics card and an ADSL connection

A sucker for a terrible German accent, *Matt Cheshire* dives into enemy trenches

RTCW's single-player game wasn't as good as we were all hoping and praying it would be. Granted, it's a great game and the visuals are fantastic, but the focus in single-player is too much on action alone. Been there, done that. However, the inclusion of class-based units in the multiplayer game, such as the medic, engineer, and lieutenant, as well as the bog-standard soldier, adds a calming aspect and makes the *Wolfenstein* experience a whole lot more satisfying.







Return To Castle Wolfenstein **provides some of the best multiplayer action around.**

There are three multiplayer game types, which are: Standard Objective Multiplayer mode (Wolf MP), Stopwatch Mode (Wolf SW), or Checkpoint (Wolf CP). In standard objective mode, the default game type, each team has one or more objectives to complete within a set time limit (adjustable in the server options menu). Wolf SW is similar to Wolf MP, but at the end of each round teams swap sides and attempt to complete their objectives faster than the previous team. Checkpoint mode sees each side battling for control of several checkpoint flags, with the victor being the team that manages to simultaneously control all checkpoints in a map. While the latter two are enjoyable, they're not quite up to the standard of the objective based games.

Servers are plentiful, and with a high-speed connection Ping rates are good, (as low as 35ms on a full server with a broadband connection) with no noticeable lag. However, users of 56K modems beware, for a server with many players spells sky high Pings and almost unplayable lag.

If you're tired of CS and *Quake III*, look no further than *RTCW*. The single-player game might not be up to much, but the multiplayer game is worth the entry fee alone. PCZ

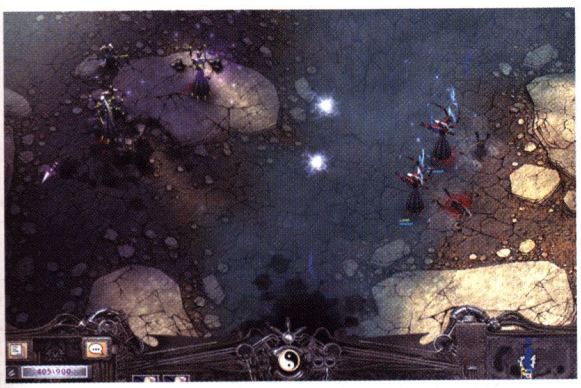
PCZONE VERDICT	
FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 112)	88
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	92
Will have you returning again and again	

BATTLE REALMS MULTIPLAYER

■ £29.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Liquid Entertainment | ETA: Now | Web: www.battlerealms.com | Players: 1-8

REQUIRES PII 400, 64Mb RAM, 3D card and a 56K modem **DESIRES** PIII 800, 128Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card and an ADSL connection

Keith Pullin **dares to enter the realm of the taunted**







Just as much fun online as it is on your own.

IF EVER A game was designed for multiplayer it was *Battle Realms*. The amazing unit alchemy concept is tailor-made for online play and already dozens of players are taking full advantage of this feature by killing each other in a variety of unspeakable ways. Of course it also helps that there are four customisable clans to choose from making online skirmishes some of the most diverse and well balanced around.

During a day of relentless onslaught I was privileged enough to be utterly annihilated by the Korean's favoured tower rush tactic, the German's speedy diversion tactic and the English no nonsense bulldog tactic. I'd like to blame the 56K modem, but even that didn't seem to be struggling as badly as my brain.

Desperate times call for desperate measures as they say. It soon becomes obvious while playing *BR* online that the only way to stand a chance of winning (if you're a bit crap like me) is to join up with someone who knows their stuff. *BR*'s team co-op play allows you to do just that by having two teams of up to four players per side battling it out. The amount of maps is also impressive with around two-dozen for you to choose from. Overall you have to say that the number of people already playing *BR* online is testament to its quality. *Battle Realms* really is a slick online experience that's going to attract the attentions of RTS anoraks for a long, long time to come. PCZ

PCZONE VERDICT	
FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 111)	86
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	86
Original and enthralling online RTS	

SHOOTER SUPERTEST

The *ZONE* team gathers together once more to decide who the true successor to *Half-Life* is. *Mark Hill* referees



THE CONTENDERS

GHOST RECON
ISSUE 110 – 86%

MEDAL OF HONOR
ISSUE 112 – 94%

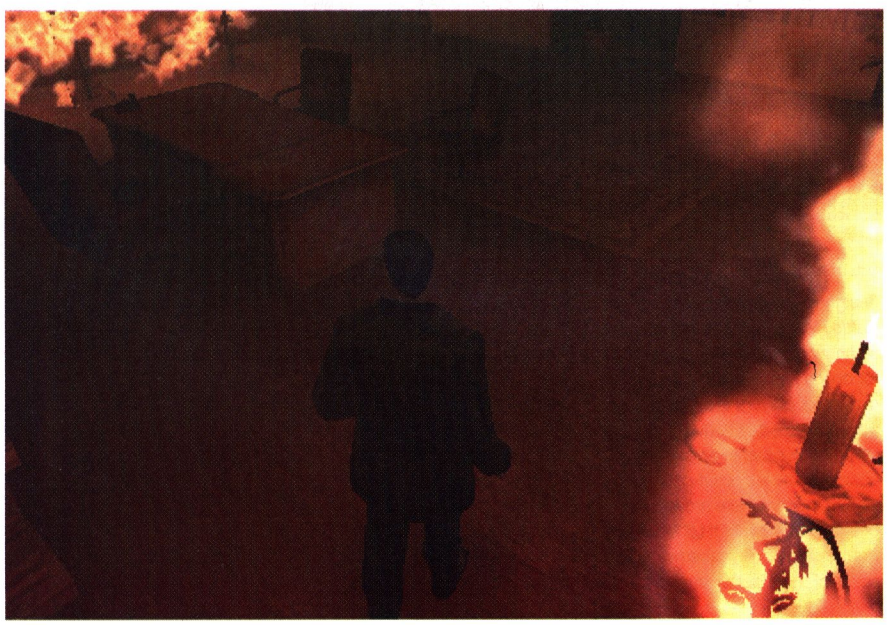
RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN
ISSUE 112 – 88%

MAX PAYNE
ISSUE 107 – 90%

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2
ISSUE 110 – 93%

BRAVE NEW WORLD

The Supertest has been in hibernation for the past nine months, recharging its batteries and getting ready for this, its triumphant return. Since it's been gone the shape of the shooting genre has changed radically and it was the natural target for our first retrospective. You'll notice that we've dropped *Half-Life* for the first time since its release, and we've also decided to open the debate to include *Max Payne* (3rd person) and *Ghost Recon* (squad-based action) to reflect the eclectic state of play in 2002.



Mark Let's start by asking the all-important question in a shooter Supertest. How many here think *Half-Life* is no longer the best shooter out there?

All (*Crowing*) Me! Me!

Mark So it's just me who doesn't think so.

Dave I think it's really close, but it's not the best any more, it's been shaded.

Richie I would say "too early to say". At the moment *Half-Life* is the best, but in six months' time, when add-ons and mods have come out it will be...

Martin But we're talking about the games, not the add-ons.

Richie Yeah, but *Half-Life* is the complete package, with the expansions and *Counter-Strike*.

Martin The question is, would the games today be as good as they are if there hadn't been *Half-Life*?

Dave Or if the PC hadn't been invented? Let's just say *H-L* is still up there, but we're looking at the new generation here. Let's face it, if you haven't bought it by now you probably won't. I received a letter the other day from a reader who was irate that we kept going on about it – he used the 'f' word three times and the 'm-f' word all in a single paragraph.

A VIEW TO A KILL

Mark We'll go for the aesthetics first. Graphics, sound, atmosphere.

Dave Graphics-wise, I *think* *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* is the best looking game on the PC.

Anthony You have to separate looks from really good effects. Although, *Wolfenstein* has all the best effects it looks really boring.

Richie I'd argue that *Max Payne* has got to be one of the best looking games ever.

Martin I'd agree with you from the screenshots that came out before it was released, but playing it now I don't think so.

Mark I think *Max Payne* is the best looking game here.

Dave It has lots of really good detail, but the engine can only deal with confined spaces, alleyways and rooms.

Richie That's just a problem with the design of the game, not the engine. There are levels that are outside.

Dave They look like they are, but it's just a big box cut out to look like outside.

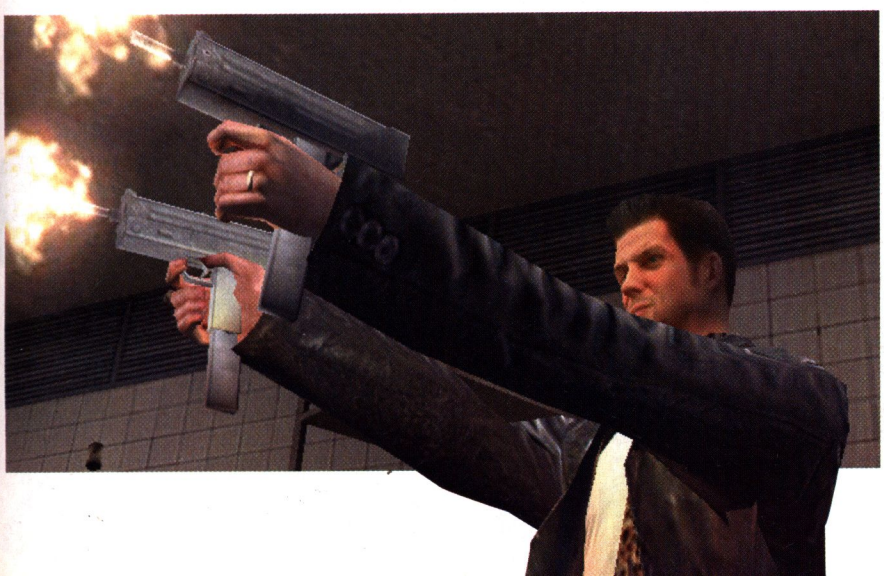
Richie Well, you can't go down to the shops and buy a packet of cigarettes, I grant you, but...

Mark Both of the *Quake III* powered games (*RTCW* and *MoH*) do that as well. They create the illusion of open spaces, but it's actually quite confined. You always move down corridors, whether it's walls by the side, mountains or bushes.

Martin In the *Medal Of Honor* landing beach mission, you can

"I think it's really close but *Half-Life* isn't the best shooter any more, it's been shaded"

move just about anywhere though. When you get through the bunkers you can zoom in and snipe all over the place.
Anthony But it's actually quite a small level overall.
Martin If we're talking about sound and atmosphere *AvP2* is it.
All (*Eyes rolling to the ceiling.*) Here we go...
Dave I think it looks crap compared to *Wolfenstein*, but in terms of atmosphere it's much better.
Richie And the character models, the way they talk and everything, is appalling. It's like *PacMan*.
Martin But certainly for lighting, sound and atmosphere it's the best here.
Anthony The LithTech engine is the worst here, but they've done wonders with it.
Dave But this shows you can hype up a game just by its graphics. *Wolfenstein* is selling shedloads.
Mark It doesn't look as good as we were led to believe though.
Dave (*Smugly*) It does if you have a G-Force 3 T500.
Richie It has some awful looking levels though. Especially when you compare its outdoor ones with *Medal Of Honor*.
Dave Putting the visuals to one side, *AvP2* is the only one where I wanted to stop and watch the story.
Mark There's one really awful voice at the beginning of the Marine campaign, though. The pilot of the dropship who's supposed to be English.
Martin Oh yeah! (*Attempts Dick Van Dyke cockney accent with a female twist*) Oh no, the shep's brokan.
Mark And the Germans in *Wolfenstein* are right out of *'Allo 'Allo*. I kept waiting for a mission objective to tell me to find the Madonna wiz ze big boobies.
Richie Yeah, but that's deliberate, it's done with a sense of humour.
Mark Well, it's not very funny.
Martin That's what really put me off *Max Payne*. The acting was atrocious.
Richie But it went with the style they wanted. I thought it worked quite well.
Martin It was just really cheesy and didn't work for me at all.
Richie This from the man whose favourite film is... (*searches for suitably demeaning title)... Kindergarten Cop*.
All (*Knee-slapping guffaws*)

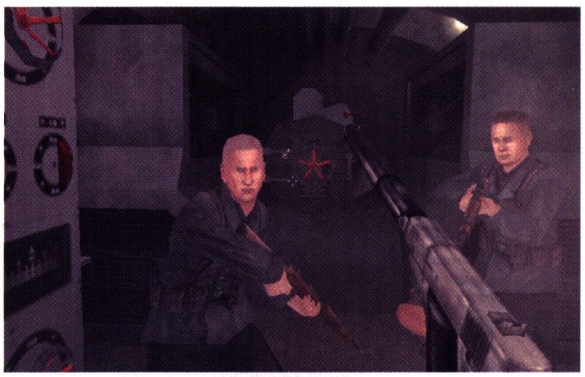


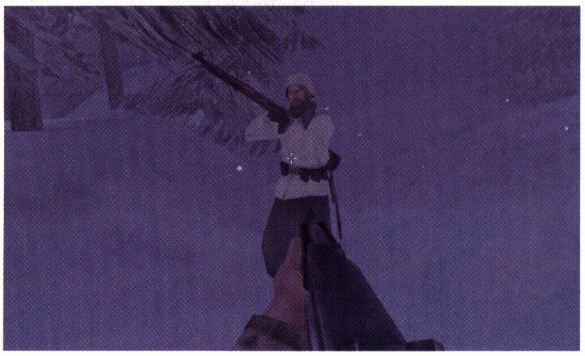




Max Payne, he's more than a one trick wonder.







Feel like you missed out on World War II? don't worry, *Medal Of Honor* is here.

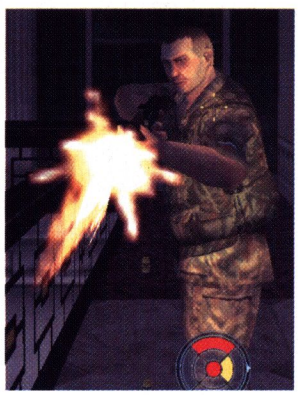
TOILET HUMOUR

Mark I tell you what annoyed me *about Medal Of Honor*, the bobbing. It's too pronounced and you can't turn it off.
Dave I really liked it, when you walk you do bob up and down.
Anthony Yeah, but your weapon bobs up and down with your head. It's not like your head stays still and your whole body dances about.
Mark *AvP2* has it, but it's much less pronounced. And you can turn it off if it annoys you.
Dave I didn't even notice it.
Anthony If you don't notice it's because it's been done right.
Mark Another annoying thing were the health bottles in *Medal*. You kill someone, they drop a bottle and when you walk over it, it makes a really cartoony sound.
Anthony None of these things matter in any of the games except for *Ghost Recon*, which is trying to be really realistic.
Dave I loved *Ghost Recon* but the engine has its flaws. You keep getting stuck in little bits of ground and have to walk round them. The vegetation is very good though.
Mark Best trees I've ever seen.
Richie The death animations are great too.
Mark They're all motion-captured.
Anthony They actually shot some people just for the game?
Mark Like you said, it's ultra realistic.
Richie The animations are good in *Max Payne* too. And if your graphics card is good enough you can see splinters coming out of wood, dust flying around and little details like that.
Anthony It's the little touches that made that game. Like you can flush the toilet.
Martin I don't think it adds anything to the game at all.
Mark But surely it makes the gaming environment more believable. Surely if you're immersed in a more realistic world the game benefits?
Martin But if all a toilet does is flush, and the sound doesn't alert the enemies or anything, it adds nothing to the game.
Anthony (*Very seriously*) I think Martin is a complete crazy person for saying that.
Mark Just look at *Deus Ex*. You can interact with everything and you really believe the world you're in. (*The argument rages for half an hour. After a good old fashion fight, during which Martin beats us all to a pulp, we're able to continue.*)
Dave And this brings us full circle. *Wolfenstein* might have the best graphics, but as a complete package, it has no atmosphere and there's no immersion whatsoever.



"The way *Aliens Vs Predator 2* weaves the three stories is really well done"





Slow, gritty and reliable, *Ghost Recon* is not your average first-person shooter.

Richie I agree… In terms of use of graphics and sound. *Medal Of Honor* wins easily. You really feel you're there.
Martin *AvP2* is a really immersive game too.
Mark And the fact that you can play through the life cycle of an alien is a stroke of genius. It's a very uneven game, though. The Predator campaign is awful.
Dave The pacing is wrong. It starts off really well, but it loses it as it goes along. Ant was asking me earlier why no-one was banging on about the game apart from us and it's because they released a really crap demo months before the actual release of the game. How stupid is that?

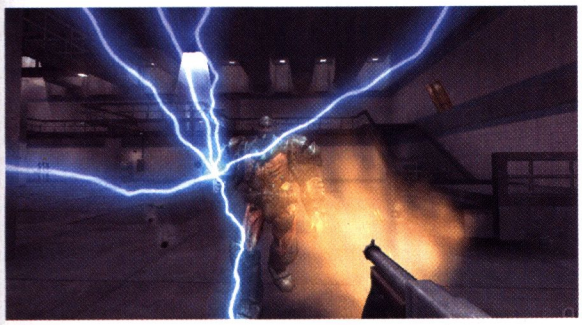
MORE BALLS THAN BRAIN

Richie The way *AvP2* weaves the three stories is really well done. It's an old story, but it's presented really well.
Mark The way it gives you the information is good. You find journals and computer files that give you information on different characters and let you know what happened before you arrived, very like *System Shock 2*.
Martin I like the way the stories cross at one point. You see the predator trapped when you're an alien, and then you see the alien looking at you when you play the predator. Or the other way round.
Dave The immersion is unbelievable, especially if you play it on your own in the dark.
Mark There are lots of clever little decoys. Swinging cranes that register on your motion sensor or that tube near the beginning that hangs from the ceiling and looks just like an alien's head.
Martin I spent ages shooting at that before I realised what it was. The ending is rubbish though.
Dave It's not the worst here though. In *Ghost Recon*, which I loved, you snipe the last enemy from about 200m away and the credits just start rolling up. It's the worst ending ever. It's like having a shit and pulling your pants up before you've finished.
All (*Moderately hysterical laughing. Someone falls off his chair*)
Richie *Wolfenstein*'s story is good, but the way you play through it and the way the levels are designed is quite poor, while *Max Payne* is the other way round.
Dave I quite liked the story in *Max Payne*. Very clichéd, but not more than most of the films that come out of America.
Mark But the writing is so atrocious.
Anthony It was good. They were trying a noirish parody, and that's what they did.
Mark Well to me it was just atrocious writing. It was too relentless to be amusing.
Dave I actually liked the story and the idea of the dream sequence, even though the execution of that was awful.
Mark The best thing about it is the way it takes film conventions and incorporates them into the gameplay. The whole game is a flashback, you get to play the bit where he discovers his wife and baby murdered and, like you say, the dream sequences.
Martin That cheesy voice was dreadful though, and so were the comic cut-scenes. It really put me off. The story is OK but the way they implemented it was rubbish.
Richie I completely disagree, it's the other way round.
Mark My biggest problem was that *Max Payne* is a complete arsehole.
Dave That's true.
Mark I couldn't be bothered to listen to him or care about the story. I downloaded skins and used a different one each time, just concentrating on the action.
Richie *Medal Of Honor* doesn't have a proper story line but the way it links up the missions and the way you come across characters in need of help gives it a human element.
Mark But you don't really have a real character. *Max Payne* is the only one that attempts to give you a character to play.
Anthony There's a good reason for that. It's the only third-person game here.





The castle's have certainly had a facelift, but what about the gameplay?

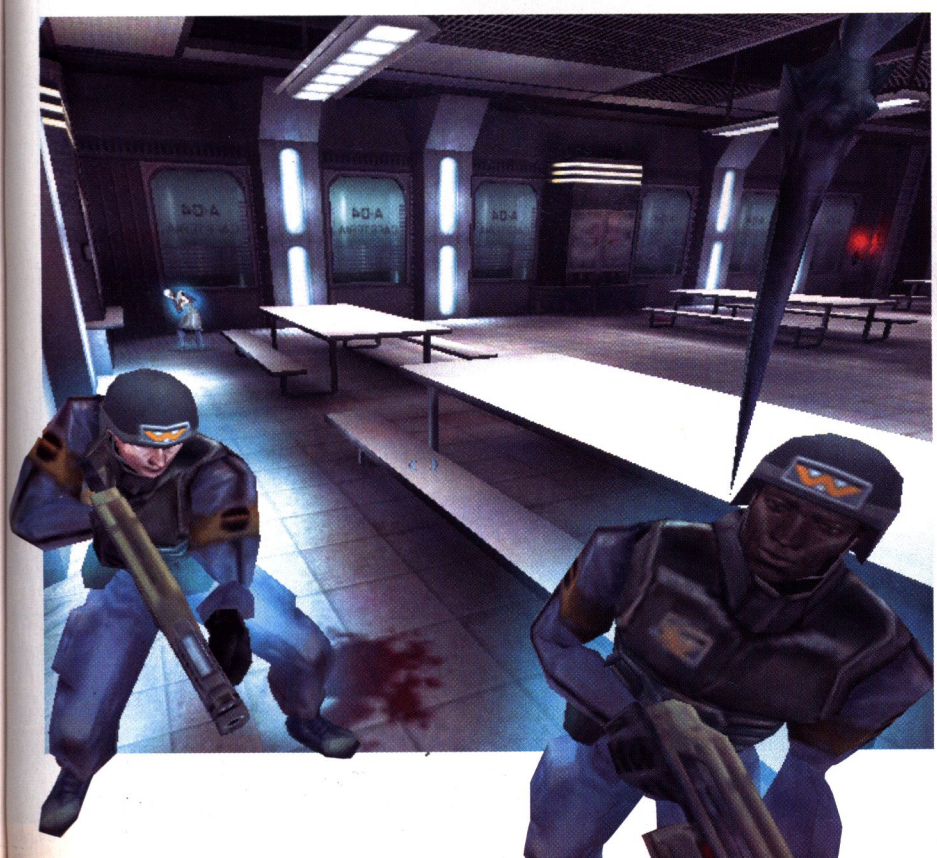


"The AI in *Max Payne* is the worst. They just stand there"

Mark Yeah, but *Deus Ex* is first-person, and that gives you a deep and complex character. He's developed by the way you interact with other people and through the choices you make.
Martin And in *AvP2*...
All (*Loud moans*)
Richie The marine isn't a proper character. You're just told to do something and you do it.
Mark You're CO describes that character best when he says: "You've got more balls than brain, son". That's a fairly accurate description of most characters in shooters.

SMART GUNS

Dave Let's go back to *Max Payne*. Some people have complained about it being too short but haven't mentioned the fact that so are other new releases, like *Wolfenstein*.
Anthony It isn't anyway, it's just the right length.
Mark I really enjoyed it, but by the time I'd reached the end I was glad. It's quite repetitive.
Martin It's a one-trick game. The bullet time is just a gimmick.
Anthony Yeah, but what a gimmick. It makes the game.
Martin But it's just too one dimensional, like *Wolfenstein*. Not enough variation.
Dave *Ghost Recon* is probably the one that stands out as being different from the rest here. In fact, I'd go as far as to say it's the second best game here.
Anthony I think it's the second worst. Really boring.
Mark It's the only one here that requires patience. Selecting your team, thinking up a strategy for approaching each section of the map, giving out the orders...
Martin You have more choice about the way you play it. You can go in front or act as back up and let others do the hard work.
Anthony But the AI isn't good enough to let them do that.
Richie You don't have any control over the other soldiers in *Medal Of Honor*, but it does a really good job of making them realistic. They're superb.
Mark Sometimes they're too good. They kept taking all my kills.
Richie With me they just did that when I was low on health.
Dave They survive longer depending on your tactical decisions, which way you choose to approach battles.
Richie Sometimes you can run out and get shot down by snipers and find that your team stays back.
Mark There was one point in *Medal* where a team mate jumped on a grenade to save me. I thought it was going to be like that scene in *Top Secret*, where the rest of the room blows up instead of the guy on the bomb. But I didn't think the enemies were that good. It relies more on their numbers than on their skill.
Dave They do run for cover.
Richie And they're clever enough to feel real.
Mark The respawning annoyed me though. I actually found a respawn point and they just kept popping out of thin air. Also the AI cheats. Enemies can always see you but you can't see them. Especially in the snowy wood levels. They can spot you through trees and rocks and you can't see a damn thing.
Dave At least the AI is better than in *Wolfenstein*. In that they just all pile in through a door while you pick 'em off one by one.
Richie I didn't think the Nazis were too bad, it's the monsters that are rubbish.
Martin The AI in *Max Payne* is the worst. They just stand there.







***Aliens Vs Predator 2*: not the smartest but it is pretty bloody scary.**

Richie But it's not about fighting intelligent enemies, it's about pulling off moves. Your team mates in *AvP2* are rubbish, and so are the human enemies.

LET'S SHOOT SOME REAL PEOPLE

Dave What about multiplayer? We haven't talked about that yet.
Richie *Max Payne*'s is rubbish.
Mark Almost non-existent, you could say.
Dave The big one is *Wolfenstein*. Initially it was single-player, but they must have realised it was shit and got someone else to do the multiplayer, which is great. It saves the game.
Richie The thing is, if it had been released as single-player it would've received 70 per cent – it's the multiplayer that makes it.
Dave id has never been brilliant at single-player games, so it gave this one to someone else.
Mark Yeah, that's logic for you. You can't do single-player so you give it to someone else who can't do it. It made *Kingpin* (it was called Xatrix) ferchrissakes, which was another dull game.
Anthony It's a good job we played the multiplayer first, which is brilliant. If I had played the single-player first I don't think I would even have bothered.
Dave The multiplayer is done by Nerve not Gray Matter and it did a fantastic job.
Mark Has it taken over from *CS* as the best multiplayer game?
Dave Not really.
Richie *Medal Of Honor*'s demo was much more popular online than *Wolfenstein*'s.
Dave It's easier to get into, without having to choose a specialised class. *Wolfenstein* is different. Anthony, who's always so intense in *Quake* and *CS* turned into a medic and ran around jabbing people with his needle.
Anthony The character classes work better than in any other game of that kind.
Mark People just don't want complications. Even *Ghost Recon* – a patient, tactical game – is mostly played as deathmatch online.

"*Medal Of Honor*'s demo was much more popular online than *Wolfenstein*'s"

Dave Exactly. *AvP2* is good in multiplayer, but no-one's going to play it as it's too complicated.
Anthony And too laggy.
Mark There are too many options, but you can't play it co-op against AI creatures anymore.
Anthony I thought it was nob.
Martin It depends how you play. If you have a group of marines against one predator or a group of aliens it's great. For team work the best is *Ghost Recon*. Playing co-op is the best way.
Dave *MOH* would have been great if you could play co-op.
Richie There's already a mod out for the demo that lets you.
Mark What annoys me is that neither of the *Quake*-powered games have bots. Surely if they'd made some intelligent enough to work then the AI in single-player would have been much better too.
Richie So which is the best game then?
Dave I want a table. Let's do one.
All (*Big groans*)

THE FUTURE OF THE SHOOTER

WILL MEDAL OF HONOR BE BEATEN THIS YEAR?

After such a long barren period, the recent glut of quality shooters discussed here will be followed by some promising titles. With the likes of *Unreal II*, *Soldier Of Fortune 2*, *Jedi Knight II* and *Halo* on the way, you could argue this may be the biggest year yet for FPSs. If that wasn't enough, *Project IGI*, the game voted best shooter of 2000 is getting a sequel really soon. Those looking for a brainier approach to all this mayhem should be delighted that Illusion Softworks is back with two crackers: the sequel to *Hidden & Dangerous* and the brilliant-looking *Mafia*.

The multiplayer scene is also going to be shaken up by what is bound to be a fierce contest between Gearbox's *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero* and Barking Dog's *Global Ops*. Both can be played solo with and against bots and could spark similar rows to those caused in their day by *Quake III* and *Unreal Tournament* (and sequels for both of these are in the works, too).

Still not impressed? How about the distant, but very real, prospect of *Doom III* and *Half-Life 2*? There's also a certain *Duke Nukem* sequel which, if it ever sees the light of day (and after all this time, we do have our doubts), could beat the whole lot.

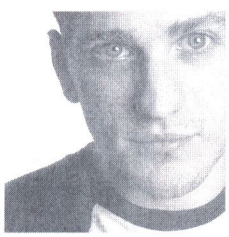


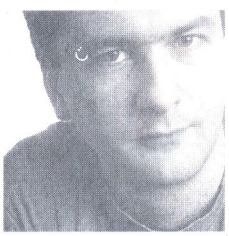
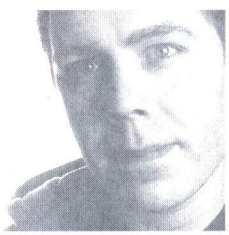
***Unreal II* promises to be the first of the next-gen shooters.**



THE VERDICT

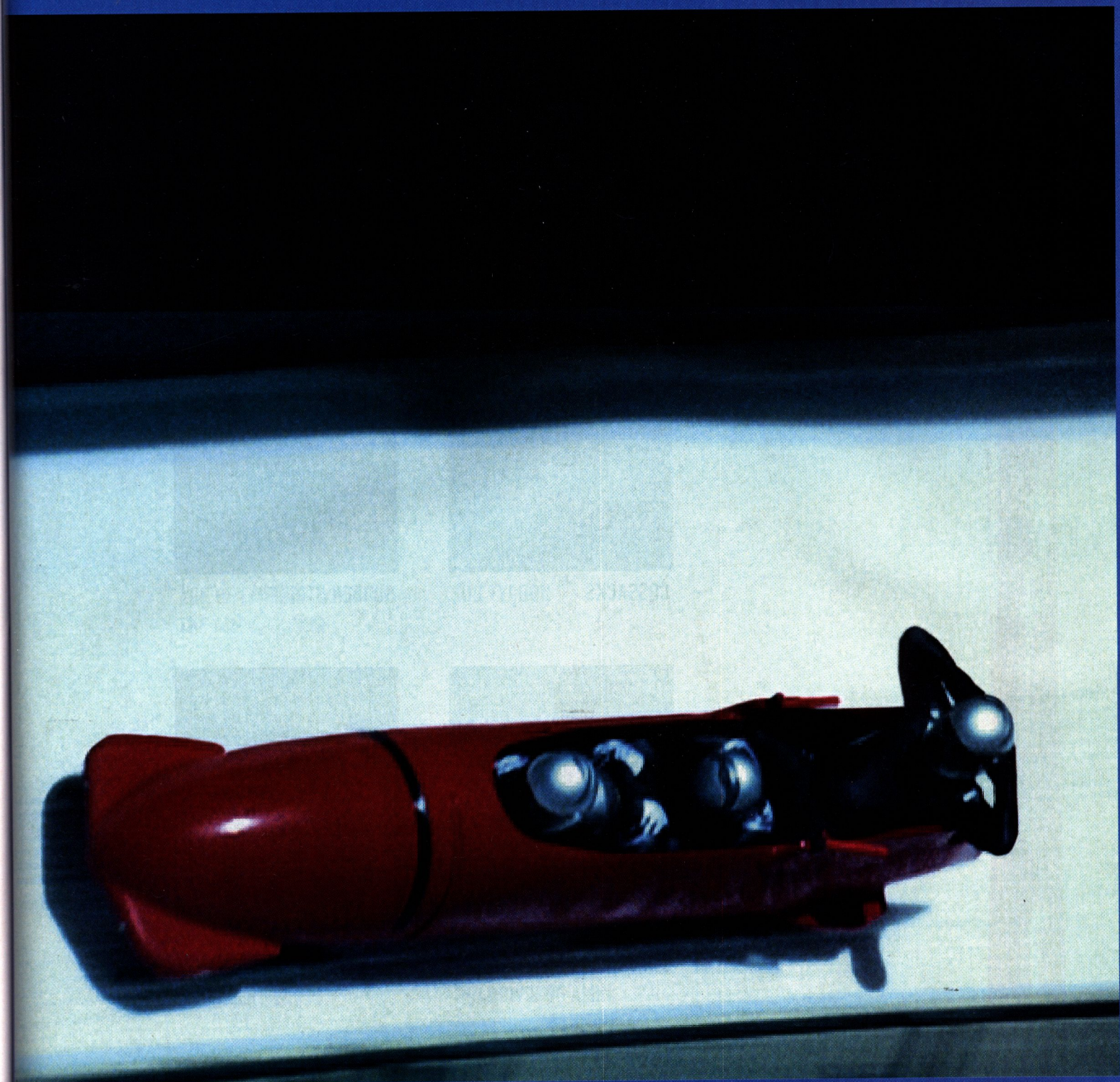
RARELY HAS A SUPERTEST ENDED WITH SUCH AN OVERWHELMING RESULT. IT'S TIME TO BELIEVE THE HYPE...




	ANTHONY	MARK	DAVE	RICHIE	MARTIN
SINGLE-PLAYER	Medal Of Honor	Medal Of Honor	Medal Of Honor	Medal Of Honor	Medal Of Honor
RUNNER UP	Max Payne	Aliens Vs Predator 2	Ghost Recon	Max Payne	Aliens Vs Predator 2
MULTIPLAYER	Wolfenstein	Medal Of Honor	Medal Of Honor	Medal Of Honor	Wolfenstein
RUNNER UP	Medal Of Honor	Wolfenstein	Ghost Recon	Wolfenstein	Aliens Vs Predator 2
ATMOSPHERE/IMMERSION	Aliens Vs Predator 2	Aliens Vs Predator 2	Aliens Vs Predator 2	Medal Of Honor	Aliens Vs Predator 2

LOOK FORWARD BTopenworld



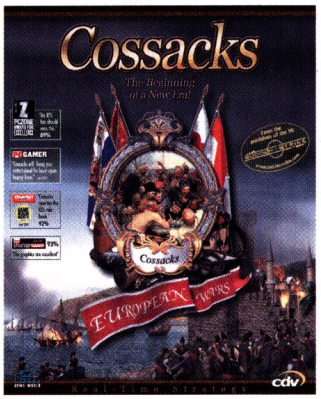
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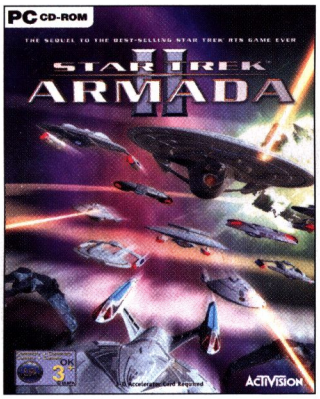
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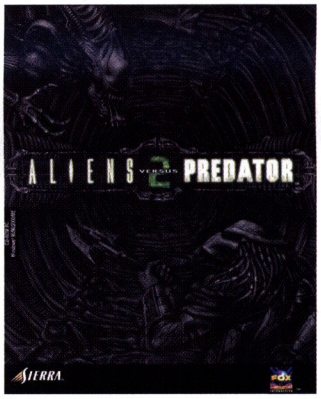
COSSACKS



SUDDEN STRIKE



STAR TREK ARMADA 2

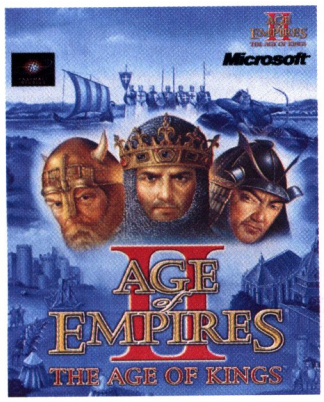


ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

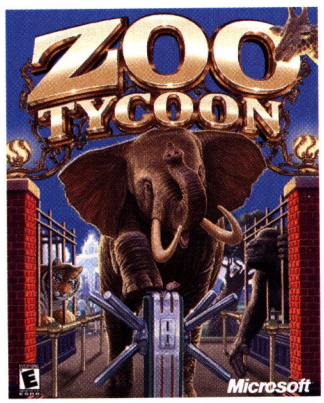
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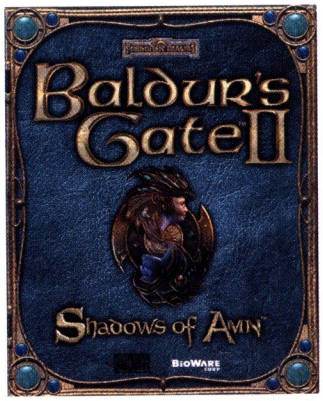
AGE OF EMPIRES 2:
THE AGE OF KINGS



ZOO TYCOON



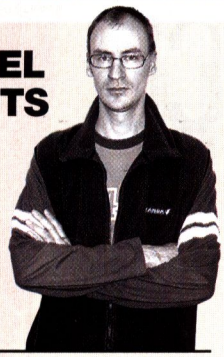
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BALDUR'S GATE 2:
SHADOW'S OF AMIN

WHATEVER TURNS YOU ON
Virgin megastores

BRUSSEL SPROUTS



■ **HARD WIRED** Tim Ponting

Welcome, friend. Where once stood a gamer, there now shall stand a techoid... or then again, maybe not. Welcome to the new look hardware section of *PC ZONE*, which each month henceforth shall be packed with all goodies techoid – from breaking hardware news to group tests, taking in technology briefs and stand-alone pants on the way – or possibly reviews if people would find that more interesting.

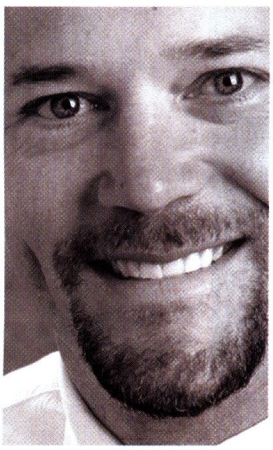
We've something of a corker for you first night out of the trap. Not only have we taken the heavyweight processors of the day and squared them up against each other, but there's also a handful of cutting-edge motherboards, including one featuring NVIDIA's brand-spanking new chipset derived in part from its work on Xbox. As we're a little bit late to the party, NVIDIA's had time to tweak BIOS and drivers until... well, why not have a read for yourself?

NVIDIA is also in the news for another reason – the recent launch of GeForce 4 to a palpitating room of smelly journalists in Brussels. We've got the full low-down on the range in an extended news feature, plus a few snippets from the jaws of none other than Dan Vivoli, legendary jet-setting mouthpiece of the Santa Clara graphics specialists.

Of course, we've kept the ever popular Buyer's Guide to help you plan your purchases, plus we'll be reviewing any relevant gaming bit and bobs as they cross our desks. Until next time...

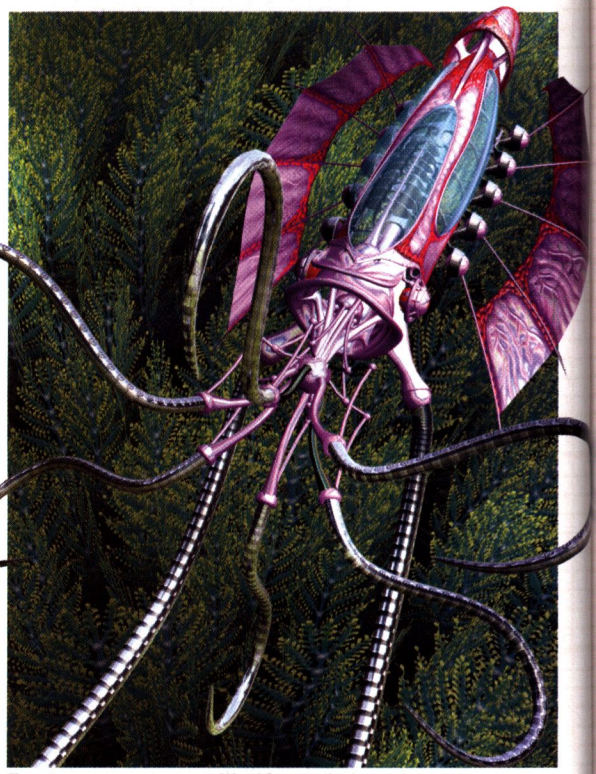
NVIDIA first with DirectX 9 3D card

...And games that look like DirectX 8 tech demos "within a year"



IN THE AGGRESSIVE war between NVIDIA and ATI for top honours in the 3D graphics card market, the launch of GeForce 4 (see the special report overleaf) represents a major coup for NVIDIA, still smarting from a smattering of reviews giving Radeon 8500 top honours against GeForce 3 in the crucial 'fastest and best 3D card' race. However, speedy though GeForce 4 undoubtedly is, its feature set is based on Microsoft's DirectX 8 standard. There has been some speculation among technology journalists that, following the launch of GeForce 4, NVIDIA might not be first to market with a card supporting the new features due to debut with DirectX 9. This would leave an arch competitor with a marketing advantage at the very least.

Not so, according to NVIDIA's vice president of marketing, Dan Vivoli. "I guarantee we will be first to market with a DirectX 9 part," he claimed at the recent launch at the Atomium in Brussels. He also gave a clear hint that the next version of the nForce motherboard chipset would have onboard video duties fulfilled by a version of GeForce 4. You read it here first.



Expect to see games with this much detail in a year.

Q&A

DAN VIVOLI

Before hopping on a coach back to Brussels, we had a quick opportunity to chat with Dan. The most pressing question really is when games will make use of DirectX 8 features – let alone DirectX 9!

DAN Well, they're starting to, actually. If you look at Xbox games... there are some that look better than most of our technology demos. On PC, *Comanche 4*'s pretty cool. We did some really neat stuff in there. It doesn't use everything, but there are a number of games that are about to come out using that waving trees stuff. That's going to become really common soon.

PCZ What steps are you taking to ensure that developers start to adopt these features?

DAN I have around 120 people in my group, about 30 to 40 of which are engineers, working in developer relations. They write code, do training, write books and teach people how to use these new features. That's one thing. The second is that we can get to these people pretty far ahead of time, where they can start to learn about what we're doing in time for the new chips. It can be really hard... because a game will take about two years to build and I can't give them a sample of our chip two years from now.

PCZ But the original GeForce came out more than two years ago and we're still not seeing many games using features such as Bump Mapping...

DAN Well, Bump Mapping wasn't that big a thing for GeForce, Transform & Lighting (T&L) was and every game supports T&L now. Bump Mapping should start appearing in the next-generation games. The developer always faces a choice: games that are built for the enthusiast use everything, but games that are more mainstream, like *The Sims*, won't use as much because it limits the market. There's always this race condition that we're in; you always find that there are a few games for the enthusiast that take advantage of everything, a few months later you get more, and then about a year or two later everyone has those features.

PCZ You stated in your presentation that there are games being developed that actually look like the tech demo you showed off, similar to the one in 3DMark2001. How long do you think before we're playing games with an environment that looks that real?

DAN Less than a year. I've seen them.

PCZ Can you tell us about them?

DAN No I can't, I'm not allowed to. I would if I could...



108 SPECIAL REPORT
The GeForce 4 is here

111 REVIEWS
Hey, good looking

112 ROUND-UP
Motherboards and processors

120 BUYER'S GUIDE
The best kit in the world

Kyro for sale

Top mid-priced 3D card makers ST flee the PC market, but Kyro will live on

DRAMA APLENTY in the 3D card sector in recent weeks, with prominent hardware manufacturer ST Microelectronics, makers of the excellent mid-priced Kyro line of chipsets, announcing it is pulling out of the consumer PC market. Citing disappointing profits from the Kyro brand, ST is currently searching for a buyer for the Kyro family, including work-in-progress on their widely rumoured next-generation chipset, the 'Super Kyro II'. Oddly enough, Kyro II cards from Hercules and Videologic (such as Hercules' 3D Prophet 4500) have been bestselling cards in the UK, offering decent performance at a sub-£100 pricepoint. This move from ST has raised fears among gamers of a deficit of cheap graphics cards in 2002, but new information given to *PC ZONE* suggests otherwise.

In the wake of ST's announcement we approached David Harold, of UK company



Imagination Technologies, for comment. Imagination is the owner of the PowerVR technology that powers Kyro, currently licensed to ST Microelectronics. David was able to reveal to us that ST is "actively seeking to sell the Kyro family along with all chip design and manufacturing personnel as a going concern. It is in negotiations and has been for a while." Part of the intellectual property being sold by ST is the licence to PowerVR series 4 and 5, the next-generation technology to be used in the 'Super Kyro II'. Since it sounds like a buyer for the Kyro line has already been found, we can assume that those customers already committed to manufacturing video cards using the 'Super Kyro II', such as Hercules with its 3D Prophet 4800, are likely to continue.

In any case, the licence granted to ST for PowerVR is non-exclusive, so if ST's sale plans fall through, Imagination will simply look for another partner. The upshot is that PowerVR is very much alive, which is good news for gamers, as though there could be a slight hiccup, we're likely to see cards based on PowerVR 4 and 5 in the not too distant future. If Kyro and Kyro II are anything to go by, they should represent excellent value for money.

PRIC£WATCH

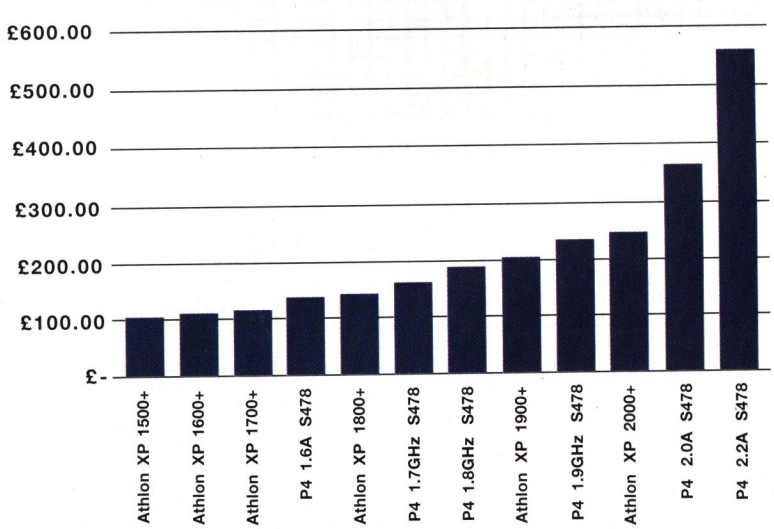
A regular look at the fluctuating cost of processors and memory

THIS IS THE first of a new series where we'll be keeping an eye on the trends in processor and RAM prices. We'll have all kinds of snazzy graphs showing the change over time, but since this is the first month, we can't. But here's the starting line-up. The cheaper Athlon XPs rule the roost at the low end of the market: you should be able to pick up a 1700+ for around £120, while the latest, greatest Pentium 4s tip up at around £144 for the 1.6GHz with Northwood core. Just look at the premium end of the market, however – you'll pay a hefty price for an Athlon XP 2000+, and as much again for the latest 2.2GHz P4.

MEMORY PRICES

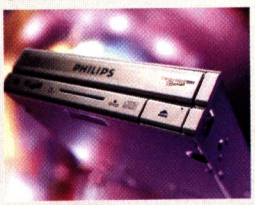
Memory prices have firmed up recently, but as our chums at Crucial are quick to point out, prices have still dropped considerably year on year. In January 2000, 128Mb PC133 memory cost £89; in January 2001, just £40; and now? A meagre £29. At press time, 256Mb PC133 CL2 modules weigh in at £46.79, while faster PC2100 DDR CL2.5 memory is sitting on £53.09. I wonder how much it'll be next month?

PROCESSOR PRICES FEB 2002



SNIPPETS

PHILLIPS IN MONTE CARLO



Philips recently demonstrated its latest and greatest PC wares to an audience of pan-European press in Monte Carlo. While there's great stuff in store on the flat-panel monitor front – keep your eyes peeled for reviews here soon – there wasn't a great deal else of note. The new DVD+R/RW drive seems to be picking up support, despite its late entry into the market. We'll be reviewing it soon and taking a look at all the competing DVD standards.

JACK OF ALL TRADES



If you're a fan of Swiss Army knives, you may be interested to hear that graphics card champion Hercules is about to start shipping a new card based on ATI's multi-purpose ALL-IN-WONDER Radeon 7500 technology. The 3D Prophet ALL-IN-WONDER 7500 aspires to be a total multimedia solution, offering Radeon 7500-spec 3D acceleration with 64Mb DDR RAM, an on-board stereo TV tuner, enhanced DVD playback and a full video-editing studio. While unlikely to be the first choice for hardcore gamers, the Hercules' package should be a good option for aspiring film-makers.

VIDEO ON DEMAND

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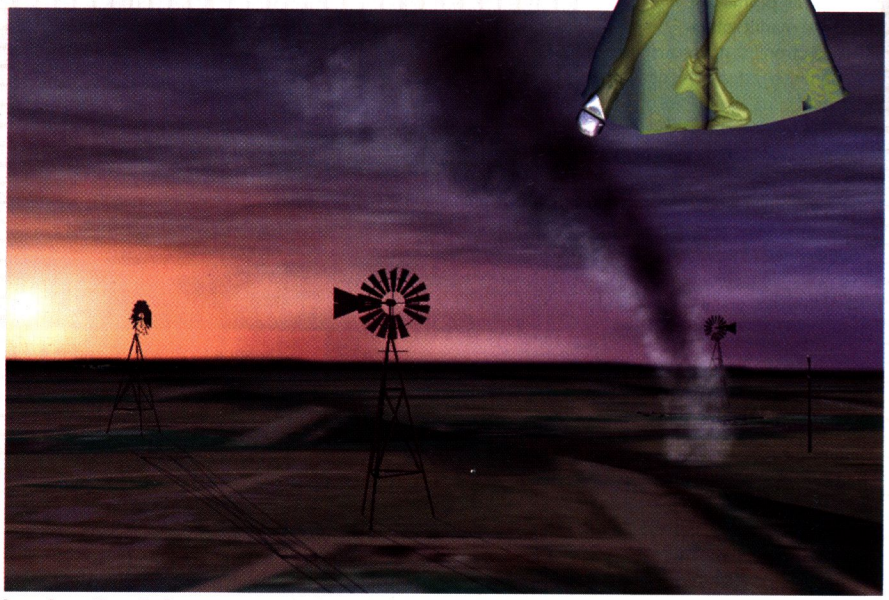
Sigma Designs, the people behind the evergreen RealMagic range of MPEG decoder cards beloved of the PC DVD fan, has recently announced the launch of a decoder card targeted at the MPEG-4 market named the Xcard. In conjunction with various companies (such as DivX Networks and Internet Streaming Media Alliance) it will offer streamed videos over the Internet. You'll be able to watch full-screen high-resolution digital video from the comfort of your armchair for less than £100 – it launches in the States for US$100 in March...

Gee Whizz!

NVIDIA ups the ante with a new range of GPUs – called, amazingly enough, GeForce 4. *Tim Ponting* took a disastrous hangover to the Atomium in Brussels to see them unveiled...







Various tech-demos show off the awesome capabilities, but it will be a long time before you see similar effects in games.

IT'S GENERALLY

accepted that it's unwise to go to bed lathered at 4:30am, only to get up at six to catch a plane to Brussels for one of the most important product launches of the year – that of NVIDIA's GeForce 4. Techoids, however, aren't necessarily endowed with common sense, just propellers on top of their heads. Avoiding the temptation to use these to fly across the Channel, one quick hop in a jet saw *ZONE*'s very own intrepid TinTin-esque boy reporter clutching a notebook in one of the teetering balls of the Atomium.

GeForce 4 represents 'evolution' rather than 'revolution', despite rather grandiose claims comparing its arrival as similar in scope to the transfer from coal-fired to atomic power. That's not to say that its performance isn't revolutionary – if it lives up to NVIDIA's claims, it should see existing GPUs trailing in its wake as it accelerates over the horizon.

WHAT'S NEW, PUSSYCAT?

There are three new chipsets in the GeForce 4 family: the Ti, MX and Go, all prefixed 'GeForce 4'. The new Titanium range is offered in two flavours (another slower model is to follow later), designated 4600 and 4400. The former has a core clockspeed of 300MHz married to 128Mb of 325MHz (650MHz DDR) RAM. Say goodbye to 64Mb cards, though some vendors can supply the cards with 64Mb if they wish. The 4400 is clocked at 275MHz (550MHz DDR) for both core and RAM. Both cards are faster in raw terms than the GeForce 3 Ti500, clocked at 240MHz and with 250MHz (500MHz DDR) RAM, and just 64Mb of it at that.

However, clockspeeds, as ever, only tell part of the story. Since DirectX 9 is a long way off, NVIDIA has introduced no new 3D features to the cards – instead, it has focused on refining its existing core technologies to improve performance.

As we all know, it's memory bandwidth that limits performance of modern 3D cards. To give an example: to render a 1280x1024 scene in 32-bit colour, with 32-bit Z buffer, with 2x Anti-aliasing and a depth complexity of 2.5 (rendering pixels that are actually behind each other) requires 315Mb per frame – at 60 frames per second, this equates to 18.9Gb/sec, just for pixel rendering alone. This is required on a sustained basis, and since the fastest memory interfaces can't handle more than around 10Gb/sec, it's clear something has to give.



"With the high speeds of the new Titanium cards, the PC is once more the leading 3D platform"

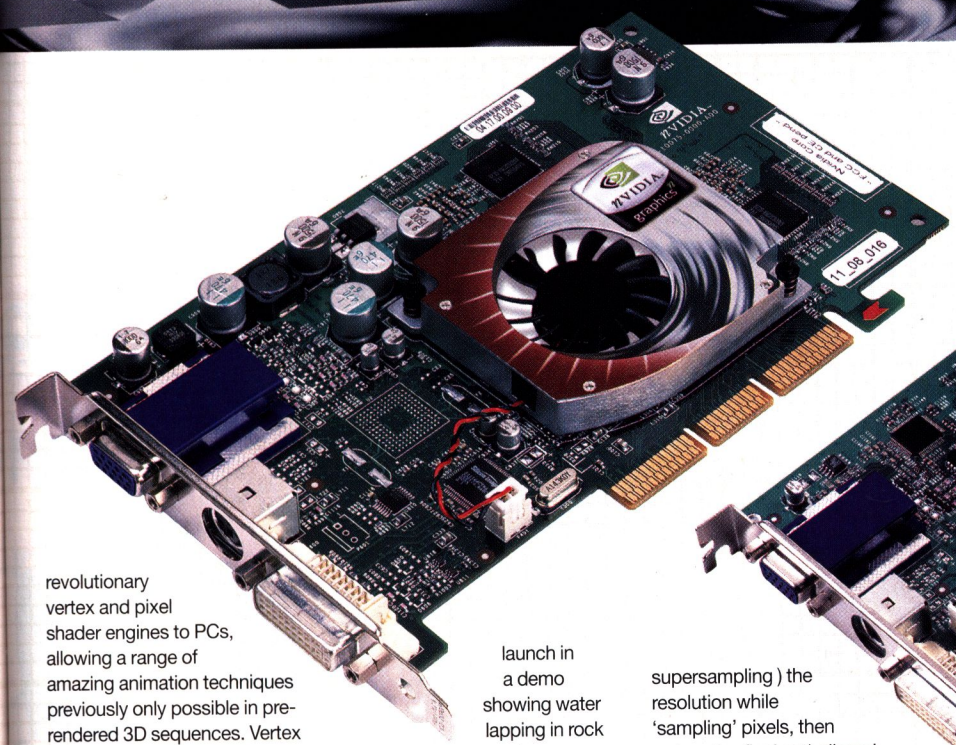
NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

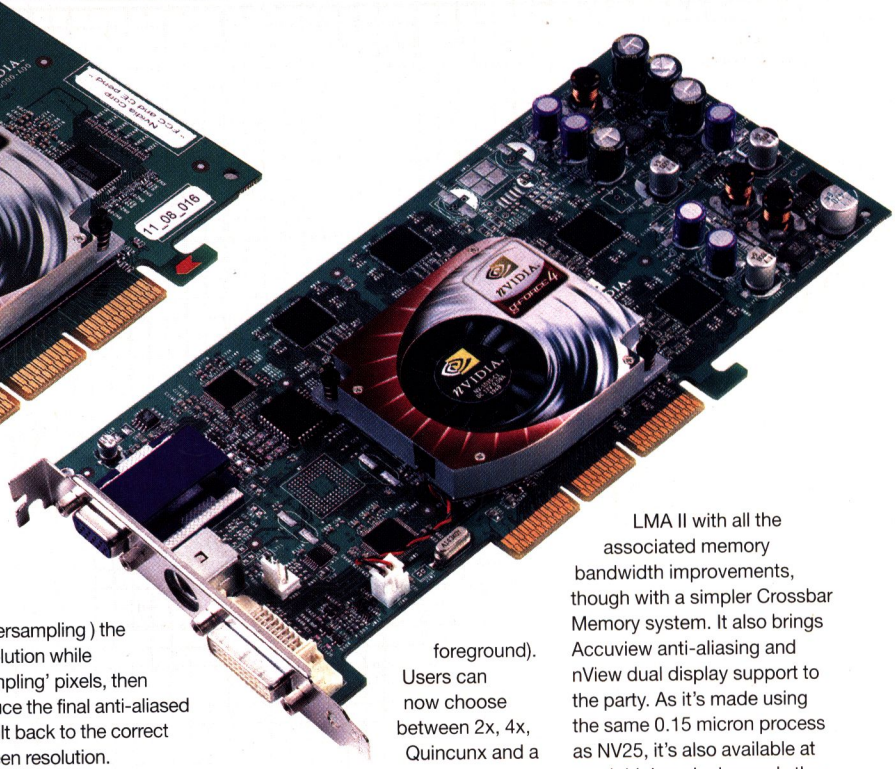
GeForce 3 saw the introduction of Lightspeed Memory Architecture, which has been massively refined in GeForce 4 with a system dubbed 'LMA II'. Firstly, it features the so-called 'Crossbar Memory Controller' which allows tiny triangles to be transferred across the interface without wasting bandwidth – normally, they would take as much bandwidth as larger triangles with more pixels. Secondly, there is a new caching system called 'Quad Cache', which allows the recall of data that has already been calculated almost instantly. Thirdly, LMA II features 'Lossless Z Compression', which basically reduces the amount of space occupied by the Z buffer depth information by a factor of four.

'Z Occlusion Culling' addresses the bandwidth hoovering that results from 'overdraw'. Typically, a scene will have certain objects in front of others. In the bad old days, every pixel in a scene would be rendered whether it would finally be visible on screen or not. On average, this means that for every pixel that's visible, two or more are rendered and redundant ones 'thrown away'. The Occlusion Culler works out whether a pixel is visible before it's rendered, recovering vast amounts of memory bandwidth in complex scenes. In addition, a so-called 'Occlusion Query' works out whether a whole triangle is invisible, in which case it won't even calculate its geometry, let alone render pixels. Of course, a system giving bandwidth saving using different techniques has been a feature of PowerVR for years, but it's only with GeForce 4 that NVIDIA has caught up. The Culler in LMA II is 25 per cent more efficient than GeForce 3's LMA.

NVIDIA has also developed a system to predict which row and column of DRAM memory is about to be accessed and 'pre-charges' it to speed data retrieval. Finally, LMA II employs a system of emptying the Z-Buffer after rendering a scene that is around ten per cent faster than traditional techniques.

The original GeForce 3 nFiniteFX engine introduced the





revolutionary vertex and pixel shader engines to PCs, allowing a range of amazing animation techniques previously only possible in pre-rendered 3D sequences. Vertex shaders, for example, allow the real-time deformation of objects using code on the GPU itself, such as proper 'stretchy' skin over joints, and foliage that moves in the wind. Pixel shaders offered developers the chance to use more complex per-pixel texturing techniques, foremost among which is the ability to produce realistic hair.

GeForce 4 (codenamed NV25), like Xbox's GPU (codenamed NV2A), now features dual vertex shaders as opposed to the single vertex shader in GeForce 3. Not only that, but it has also improved its pixel shader technology to deliver more performance, though it doesn't stretch to the Pixel Shader 1.4 specification supported in ATI's latest Radeons. However, it does support more advanced bump mapping, as demonstrated at the launch in a demo showing water lapping in rock pools.

With the high speeds of the new Titanium cards, the PC is once more the leading 3D platform, as it can now exceed Xbox performance. Whoopee!

ANTI-ALIASING TO THE FORE

NVIDIA's own research has shown that users want better – and faster – anti-aliasing, a technique that smooths jagged edges on screen. This is achieved by 'sampling' a number of pixels around the pixel being anti-aliased, then recalculating its colour accordingly to give a visual impression of a smoother edge. While high-quality 'Super-Sampling' modes have been available for a while, these are extremely wasteful as they effectively double (2x supersampling) or quadruple (4x supersampling) the resolution while 'sampling' pixels, then reduce the final anti-aliased result back to the correct screen resolution.

NVIDIA has improved the performance of its anti-aliasing by using wider internal data paths on chip to handle the extra virtual pixels it's considering before rendering the final pixel – these improved parallel pipelines are up to twice as fast as those found on GeForce 3. The new 'Accuview' anti-aliasing engine also improves the quality, by using different positions for the samples it takes, and also by incorporating anisotropic filtering (which improves the look of textures that flow from the background to the foreground). Users can now choose between 2x, 4x, Quincunx and a new 4xS mode (DirectX only), all with improvements in frame-rates over the same technologies in GeForce 3.

BEYOND TITANIUM

We've concentrated on the high-end Titanium range, but there are two other GeForce 4 chipsets: the 'MX' and the 'Go'. It's vital to realise that GeForce 4 MX is codenamed 'NV17', and is not a true DirectX 8 part – it has no vertex or pixel shader engines. In a way, it's a GeForce 2 on steroids. However, it does feature LMA II with all the associated memory bandwidth improvements, though with a simpler Crossbar Memory system. It also brings Accuview anti-aliasing and nView dual display support to the party. As it's made using the same 0.15 micron process as NV25, it's also available at much higher clockspeeds than GeForce 2 MX, and the range leader will be far faster than the old MX.

Finally, there is a new mobile part released, dubbed 'GeForce 4 Go'. This appears to be a GeForce 4 MX with different packaging and advanced power management systems. Those of you with vast amounts of money can queue to buy the latest Tosh laptop and play *Wolfenstein* at blistering frame-rates. Expect to see the first reviews of GeForce 4 cards next month, along with a comparative review of the Radeon 8500. PCZ

THE GEFORCE 4 FAMILY

	GeForce 4 Ti 4600	GeForce 4 Ti 4400	GeForce 4 MX 460	GeForce 4 MX 440	GeForce 4 MX 420
GPU Clockspeed	300MHz	275MHz	300MHz	270MHz	250MHz
Memory Clockspeed	650MHz (DDR)	550MHz (DDR)	550MHz (DDR)	400MHz (DDR)	166MHz (SDR)
Triangles/sec	136 million	125 million	38 million	34 million	31 million
Memory Bandwidth/sec	10.4Gb	8.8Gb	8.8Gb	6.4Gb	2.7Gb
Max memory	128Mb (DDR)	128Mb (DDR)	64Mb (DDR)	64Mb (DDR)	64Mb (SDR)

THE MORE THE MERRIER

Although it's going to be a long while before games use this feature, NVIDIA has also introduced support for dual monitors on chip. This uses a clever mixture of routines in hardware and software to give extremely sophisticated dual monitor features, such as window transparency effects (you can use a hot-key to see what's in the window behind the one on top) and zooming. It opens up the ability to have games that use, say, the left screen for the play area and the right for controls – ideal for RTS. But remember, every pixel has to be rendered, so twice the screen area means half the frame-rate, so it's unlikely that we'll see 3D games using this feature for a long while.

Expect the first reviews of the new GeForce 4 cards next issue. In the meantime, you can drool over the new fur effect.



BUT WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

GPU Graphics Processing Unit – just like the main processor in your PC, but designed purely for 3D image processing

CORE CLOCKSPEED The speed at which the GPU cycles per second; the faster it cycles, the more instructions can be processed

MEMORY CLOCKSPEED The speed at which the memory can be accessed – again, the faster, the better

DDR RAM Double Data Rate Random Access Memory supports data transfers on both the rising and falling edges of each clock cycle, effectively doubling the memory's data throughput

Z BUFFER An area of memory on a graphics card that is used to store the depth information of a pixel – i.e. the 'Z' axis as opposed to the X and Y axes.

TRIANGLES The smallest geometric shape, used to make up all 3D objects

ANTI-ALIASING A technique used to reduce the jagged edges in images based on pixels

PIXEL A dot on screen. Lots of pixels make an image

DEPTH COMPLEXITY The average number of pixels that would have to be drawn to account for objects being rendered that are in the scene but obscured by other objects. Most modern games have a depth complexity of two to three, meaning each pixel you see has on average one to two pixels 'behind' it

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HERCULES PROPHETVIEW 720

■ Manufacturer: Hercules | Street Price: £390, inc VAT | Phone: 020 8686 5600 | Web: www.hercules-uk.com

It's blue, slim and sexy – just like the alien babe from *Farscape*. *Tim Ponting* decides he can't live without his Prophetview

JUSTIFIABLY famous for its graphics cards, the Prophetview 720 represents Hercules' first foray into the world of monitors – but not just any monitor. The 720 is a bang-up-to-date TN (Twisted Nematic) + Film Liquid Crystal Display, the panel manufactured by Samsung. The 'film' referred to above is overlaid on the panel, vastly improving the viewing angle, a perennial problem with earlier displays.

Why should you buy an LCD monitor? Perfect geometry. Because each pixel is precisely located in the panel, the image is exactly the shape it should be. Contrast this with a traditional CRT (Cathode Ray Tube) monitor, where the geometry can be out by up to 0.3mm at the edges of the screen. No trapezoidal adjustments necessary here! But the overwhelming advantage of LCD is its size and weight. The Prophetview 720's main panel is just 2cm thick, and sat on a desk in front of you will occupy a depth of around 14cm. It's also a featherweight 3.5kg. Much easier to lug to a LAN party than a beefy 17-in CRT, which is the size of monitor you'll need to reproduce the viewable screen area of this 15-in LCD.

THE DOWNSIDE

On the downside, it displays fewer colours (just 16 million), demonstrates much lower contrast (everything looks more drab), has a comparatively narrow viewing angle, and has a visible 'response' time – pixels take a while to turn on and off again, giving problems with moving images in games.

The Hercy is right in the middle of the LCD pack – average in every aspect (brightness, contrast, response time, viewing angle). It may sound like damning with faint praise, but it's an excellent all-round purchase. Playing *Quake* is fine, provided you crank up the gamma.

RAW SEX

What marks the 720 out from the pack is its gorgeous design. No other display, past or present, is this sexy. The metallic blue panel is married to a delicate, crescent-shaped base. Connection to the monitor is by analogue VGA cable only: no digital connection is present – a shame considering how many of Hercules' own graphics cards have digital out for LCD displays. The power is supplied by a separate box, and the power cable hangs awkwardly from the underside of the monitor – you might find after plugging and unplugging it a few hundred times it has a tendency to fall out, but we had no trouble while reviewing the screen.

Maximum resolution is a crystal clear 1024x768 at a refresh rate of 75Hz, ideal for gaming. In fact, we love this product. If you need to carry a monitor around with you, or have a narrow playing area too shallow for a monitor, this rocks. PCZ

PCZONE VERDICT 87

Probably the sexiest monitor in the world

LCD – HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

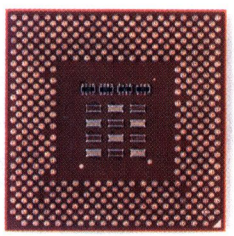
Remarkably, liquid crystals were first discovered in 1888 – and even more remarkably – by an Austrian botanist, Friedrich Reinitzer. And I could only think of famous skiers from the land that makes baking cakes an art form.

LCD displays are based on the principle that depending on the voltage passed through each red, green and blue subpixel, the orientation of the liquid crystals can control the amount of light passed through to the display panel. The most common and cost-effective type of display is known as TN + Film, 'TN' short for 'Twisted Nematic'. In this panel, the helical structure of the crystals causes the panel to display a white dot (maximum RGB brightness) when no voltage is supplied. When a voltage is applied, the structure of the crystals is disrupted, and they try to align themselves with the electric field. In the most extreme case, the light cannot pass through to the panel, giving a black dot on screen. By varying the voltages applied and utilising different RGB values, gradations of shade and colour are displayed.

So now you know. Investigate further if you wish, but be warned – it's rocket science.

SUPERCHARGE YOUR SYSTEM

Thinking of upgrading your system or buying a new PC? *Tim Ponting* puts the latest and greatest processors and motherboards through their paces



IN THE OLD days it was easy: Intel dominated the processor market and choosing an alternative just wasn't an option. Then came the rebirth and reinvention of AMD with its superlative Athlon range of CPUs. Since then, we've seen their popularity among gamers become almost ubiquitous, with a staggering 66 per cent (according to the latest *PC ZONE* reader survey) of you now using AMD processors to power your gaming system. Intel has appeared to struggle in AMD's wake, unable to compete either in terms of performance or price. Is this still the case?

With the arrival of Pentium 4, Intel threw down the gauntlet to AMD in the upper ranges of the market. Ever increasing clockspeeds, coupled with fast but expensive Rambus-based memory solutions has seen Intel closing the gap on Athlon. But the hefty cost of P4 systems has continued to hold Intel's resurgent fortunes back.

For the purposes of this feature we've taken the two top processors at the time of writing from AMD and Intel and given them a good, solid, gaming workout. In the red corner you've got Intel's staggeringly clocked 2.2GHz Pentium 4, based on the brand new 0.13 micron Northwood core designed for use in Socket478 motherboards. Its nemesis is AMD's Athlon XP 2000+ running at 1.67GHz, surely one of the final guises of the 0.18 micron Palomino core before AMD moves to its new 0.13 micron CPU technology, known as 'Thoroughbred'. Bear in mind that at the time of writing, the 2.2GHz Pentium 4 has a street price of around £580, compared with £265 for the Athlon XP 2000+. Pentium 4 certainly doesn't offer the best value for money at present, though this may well change when more games support its high-tech instruction set SSE2 – more on which below.

In parallel with CPU developments, we've seen a bewildering array of motherboard chipsets come – and in many cases – go again. As memory prices have dropped – despite the recent blip upwards – we've seen the arrival of DDR (Double Data Rate) SDRAM, with a range of motherboards poised to take advantage of its performance. We've taken a look at motherboards utilising three DDR-friendly motherboard chipsets: Intel's new 845D, which is the first native Intel DDR chipset for P4, and for Athlon, boards based on Via's KT266A and NVIDIA's nForce 420D.

THE HEARTS THAT BEAT

There's a great deal of confusion surrounding the performance of today's hottest processors – speaking of which, if you chose to cool your CPU with an egg, you could most certainly fry both the egg and the processor almost simultaneously!

The clockspeed represents the number of times the processor cycles in one second. The 2.2GHz Pentium 4 cycles 2.2 billion times per second, a speed that would almost certainly cause a rent in the fabric of space and time if a courier attempted to weave through traffic with legs pounding so rapidly. However, the clockspeed tells only part of the story. Within a single cycle, a processor carries out a number of 'instructions'. A given processor, depending on its architecture, may process more instructions per cycle than another, hence may have better performance than another processor with a higher clockspeed that processes fewer instructions per cycle.

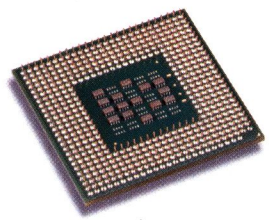
"There's confusion about the performance of today's processors"

This is one of the major reasons why Athlon XP processors perform so well at lower clockspeeds, thanks to their Quantispeed architecture, which provides more pathways to supply instructions to the CPU. Because of this, AMD abandoned the clockspeed rating for processors, preferring to use a 'notional' speed rating intended to compare conservatively against the equivalent Pentium 4 processor. Hence, XP 2000+ is AMD-speak for 'we reckon it's at least equivalent in performance to a 2GHz Pentium 4', despite the fact that it runs at just 1.67GHz.

Athlon XP processors are constructed using a 0.18 micron process – this refers to the density of the processor's elements. The Athlon XP 2000+ is considerably larger than the Northwood 2.2GHz Pentium 4, constructed using a 0.13 micron process. Generally, the smaller the processor, the less heat that's produced – but by the same token, the faster the clockspeed, the more heat is produced, so faster Pentium 4s still require enormous heatsinks.

SIZE MATTERS

Another important consideration in assessing processor performance is the size of the cache built into the CPU. The Athlon has until recently had the lead with 384Kb of on-board cache, but Northwood processors carry a hefty 512Kb cache. The cache increases the efficiency of the processor by acting as a local store for instructions, removing the need for transferring as much data between the main system RAM and the processor – this being far slower than memory transactions within the processor itself.



All PC processors support the ancient x86 instruction set that was first defined by Intel in the dark ages – beginning with the 8086 in 1978. Over the years, the chip giants have added instructions to this basic set, designed to enhance application performance in various areas. For example, AMD developed a set of instructions that developers could utilise known as '3D Now!' to speed the calculations required to produce real-time 3D graphics on screen. These instruction set wars are extremely significant, as the processor manufacturer with a well-supported enhanced instruction set will see massive performance gains in apps that utilise them. AMD has developed its own specialised instructions around the 3D Now! brand, which has transmogrified into '3D Now! Professional'. This uses a technique known as SIMD (Single Instruction Multiple Data) to allow a single instruction to act on multiple bits of data. Intel's original version of SIMD, SSE (Streaming SIMD Extensions) is found in many Intel processors, including Pentium 4. AMD has managed to build the ability to interpret SSE instructions into 'Palomino' Athlons with 3D Now! Professional, but has now been leapfrogged by Intel. Pentium 4 has a further instruction set called 'SSE2', which at present AMD cannot support.

Confused? So you should be! It's basically a gargantuan mess. What's important to remember is that most games use 3D APIs (such as DirectX) that support one or more of these specialised instruction sets, so as long as you're with P4 or Athlon XP, you won't go far wrong. However, it's worth noting that SSE2 produces massive performance enhancements when applications are written with them in mind – such as *eRacer* from Rage. Such games are few and far between at the moment, but more will come. Mind you, by then the chances are AMD may have found a way of supporting SSE2.

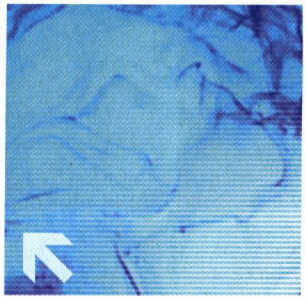
This section of the feature could literally occupy the whole of *PC ZONE*. What, you mean you want games reviews as well? Chip architecture is not surprisingly the most complex aspect of PC performance. If you really want to get your hands dirty, we suggest you buy a bag of compost from your local allotment vendor, or head to either www.amd.com or www.intel.com for more info.

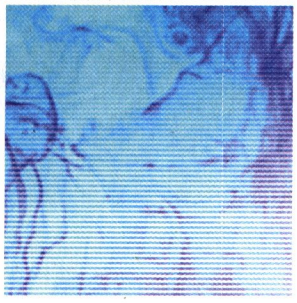
FISSION CHIPSETS

Of course, a processor doesn't work very well when you sellotape it to a cornflake packet. Your choice of motherboard and its associated chipset – the gubbins that handle communication between the CPU and the rest of the computer components, from memory to video card – is an important decision.

Modern motherboard architecture requires two main chipset components known as Northbridge and Southbridge. The Northern element handles communication between the system memory, processor, any cache RAM not on-chip and the PCI and AGP busses. The Southern sibling handles the IDE controllers, USB ports, BIOS, Power Control and the ISA bus (if there is one, no modern boards carry 8- or 16-bit slots anymore).

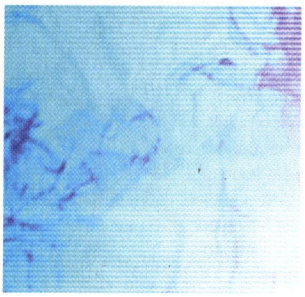
We've selected three chipsets for the purposes of the feature, all of which support DDR SDRAM. First off is Intel's new 845D chipset (82845 MCP Northbridge, 82802BA ICH2 Southbridge), which supports DDR memory at up to 266MHz. Intel chipsets are justifiably famous for their stability and the 845D is no exception, though it's worth noting that this chipset – and the Intel D845BG motherboard supplied – do not show off the full power of the P4





processor. This is the remit of motherboards supplied with the Intel 850 chipset, which is further enhanced by expensive RDRAM. We suspect that benchmark results would have painted a somewhat different picture with a different motherboard.

There are other DDR chipsets for P4 available, notably the SiS 645 and Via P4X266A, the last of which is subject to a nasty legal wrangle. Bear these options in mind and do some research online before you buy.



ATHLON-TASTIC

Moving on, we have selected the popular Via KT266A chipset for Athlon, supporting DDR memory at up to 266MHz. The boards tested use the Via KT266A Northbridge with Via VT8233 Southbridge. The KT266A is a major revision of the earlier KT266, which had poor memory controller implementation and suffered in benchmarking alongside AMD's own 760 chipset. This time round, Via seems to have got it right – the data throughput and integrity problems that plagued the KT133/A/266 chipsets (popular though they were) seem to be absent from the 266A.

Lastly, NVIDIA has taken its first steps into the ultra-competitive world of motherboard chipsets with nForce. Northbridge duties are handled by the IGP processor, either in 420D flavour with dual 64-bit 'Twin Bank' memory architecture (needs two DDR DIMMs to take advantage of it) or the 220D with standard 64-bit memory interface. It also features direct integration with an on-board GeForce 2 MX graphics processor (you don't actually need a separate video card in this board unless you have a faster one), which runs at 6x (AGP is generally limited to 4x).

"nForce is a fascinating new entrant, with good reasons for adoption"

Southbridge duties are handled by the MCP chipset, which includes an integrated six-channel audio processor in its MCP-D form tested here. The link between Northbridge and Southbridge is particularly fast, capable of data transfer at the rate of 400Mb/sec in each direction. Overall, nForce is a fascinating new entrant, with plenty of good reasons for adoption, not least because it stems from NVIDIA's design work for Xbox.

ON THE BENCH

Benchmarking these beasts turned out to be a gargantuan task. After careful consideration, we eventually made the decision to use Windows XP Home as the operating system, given that these motherboards are optimised for that platform. Benchmarking under XP is a nightmare because the system is never idle, so careful note was made of Microsoft's own benchmarking guidelines.

For maximum performance, the systems were packed with two 512Mb PC2100 266MHz DDR DIMMs from Crucial, rated at CL2.5. For the purpose of comparison, we were careful to test the motherboards with all on-board peripherals disabled (such as network devices and audio processors). All PCs were fitted with a simple Netgear network card, a SoundBlaster Audigy and a Hercules 3D Prophet Ti500 graphics card, with the AGP slot in 4x mode. In the case of the MSI board, we also ran tests using the on-board GeForce2 MX.

In every case, we upgraded the BIOS and all motherboard drivers to the latest available versions. The tests were heavily slewed to graphics performance, so no office application benchmarks. The only exception was the inclusion of certain SiSoft Sandra tests for raw component performance testing. Bear in mind that these use the best possible optimisation for each processor, hence many of the tests show SSE2 enhanced performance for Pentium 4.

ASUS A7V266-E

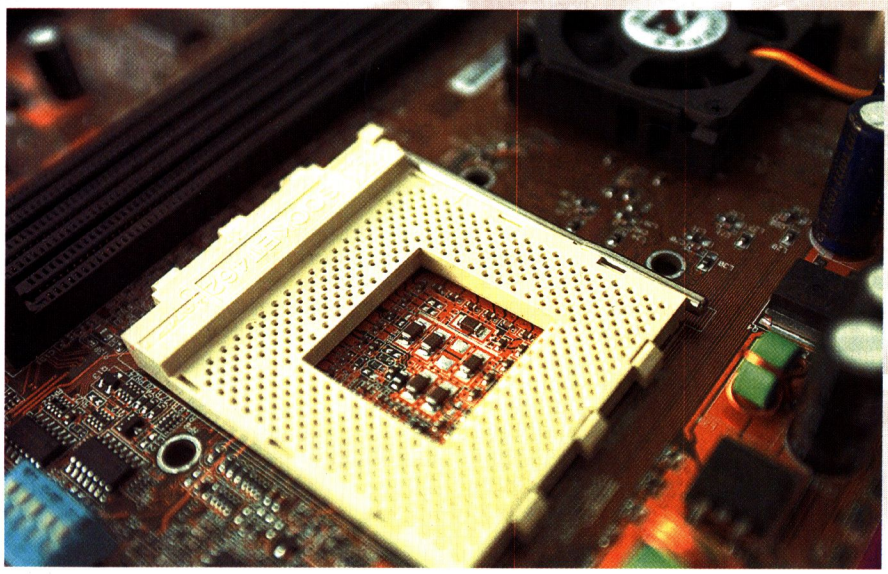


■ Manufacturer: Asus | Street Price: £140 inc VAT (RAID/Audio version) | Phone: N/A | Web: www.asus.com

Asus has an enviable reputation for reliable, high-performance boards, and the A7V266-E is no exception, wearing the outgoing Best Buy motherboard crown in *the PC ZONE* Buyer's Guide.

It's physically a massive board, so unless you remove all devices from your case before installation, it's a fiddly process. The manual supplied is superb, and all connections are simple to perform. There are a few jumpers that need checking, but it's pretty painless.

Though the board supports six USB devices, only two are on the back panel and no back plate connectors are supplied as standard. We found one for a fiver online, but a month later we're still awaiting delivery. Bear in mind that mobo makers seem to use a variety of pin-outs for these connectors, so you probably won't be able to use one you already have.



The board we tested had the optional on-board ATA-100 RAID featuring a Promise chipset. This is overkill really for gaming, but for workstation use or audio/video work can be extremely useful. The five PCI slots are also accompanied by an Advanced Communication Riser slot for suitable devices, along with three DIMMs for a maximum of 3Gb RAM.

On-board audio services are provided by the 24-bit CMI8738 – we've had trouble in the past with certain driver issues, but it seems to work OK here. The three connections on the back can be switched for 5.1 output, so no additional hardware is needed for 5.1 DVD playback.

Strangely, the motherboard refused to restart under Windows XP Home, though shutdown was fine. The restart case switch saw quite a bit of use during testing. However, apart from this the board was completely stable. The SMART hard drive monitor also predicted a hard drive failure, which didn't occur on any of the other boards. Needless to say the drive didn't fail, though it is a couple of years old.

In benchmarking, the board performed well alongside its direct competitor, the Gigabyte GA-7VTXH, ahead in almost all cases. The board is a reasonably good option for over-clockers, though there are more configurable boards out there, for example the Abit KR7-RAID.

This is the only board supplied with an AGP Pro slot, though again this isn't necessarily of significance for gamers as it's only high-end graphics workstation cards that require it.

The Asus board is definitely a good all-round buy for gamers, if a little pricey with the RAID option. Stable (bar the odd XP restart issue), it benchmarks well and offers an excellent mixture of features.

PCZONE VERDICT 86

A fine all-rounder – was formerly our Best Buy

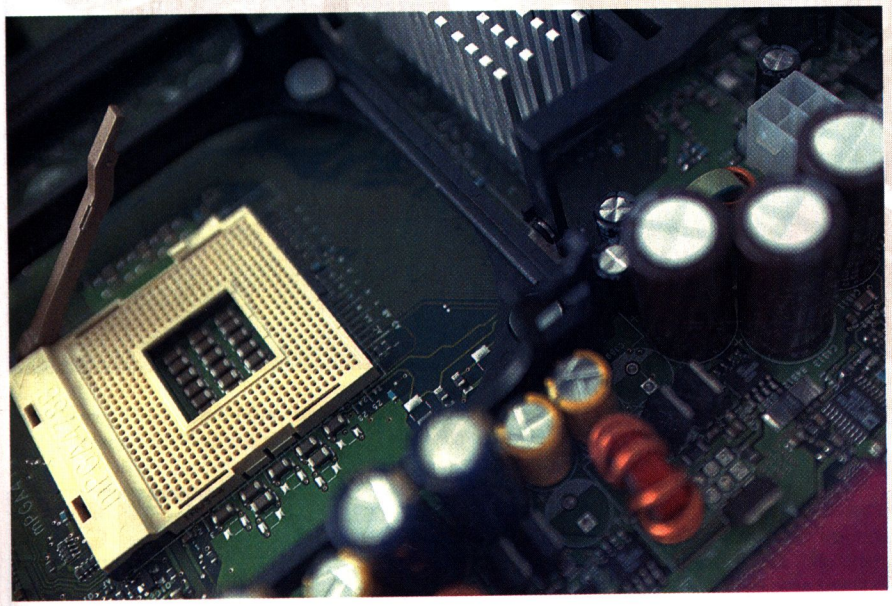
INTEL D845BG



■ Manufacturer: Intel | Street Price: £105 inc VAT | Phone: 01793 403000 | Web: www.intel.com

Intel's own board is a thing of beauty, provided you're a geek. It exudes quality, and as is Intel's general policy, it's all about stability rather than speed. It carries a massive processor fan mount coupled to an equally huge fan assembly, supplied with the Pentium 4 processor. Bear in mind you need a full P4-compatible PSU with the extra trailing power lead – since P4 can suck up 60 Watts, it's worth getting a meaty one.

The board supplied featured Intel's own 10/100 LAN chipset and connector on the back panel, along with an excellent four USB ports as standard, all on the back panel – no slot space is needed. A further three ports can be connected, one of which is on an optional CNR card. It also carries no fewer than six PCI slots. There are only two DIMM slots (which is part of the Intel spec), though other motherboard manufacturers offer 845-based boards with thee DIMM slots. Also, as an official Intel part, there's no facility for over-clocking.



The Intel BIOS boots machines extremely quickly – one of its major plus points. Windows XP Home installed seamlessly and the board proved 100 per cent reliable in operation. If there's any criticism, it's that connection of the case cables (power, reset and so on) is fiddly. The board itself is badly labelled and the manual less than clear.

On-board sound services are supplied by an Analogue Devices chipset. This is not a multi-channel solution out of the box, but can be upgraded to 5.1 with a suitable CNR card – Intel's website has a list of options.

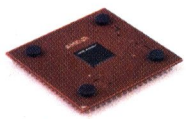
In testing, the board trailed the KT266A and nForce designs – but interestingly proved the fastest when running the admittedly ancient *Quake III Arena* time demo. As more applications become optimised for SSE2 instructions, performance should improve across the board.

In conclusion, the D845BG is a decent board for the system-conscientious. Its stability makes it ideal for general workstation use – music, as well as games. No over-clocking, no messing. Performance heads should go for a board featuring the Intel 850, though with Rambus memory, it's not cheap.

PCZONE VERDICT 79

Solid board for Steady Eddies into stability

GIGABYTE GA-7VTXH



■ Manufacturer: Gigabyte | Street Price: £90 inc VAT | Phone: 01908 362700 | Web: www.gbt-tech.co.uk

Even though it doesn't offer a RAID option, the VTXH is a stunning board for a street price around £90. Gigabyte has always been well known for providing good, stable performance at a low cost, and this is no exception.

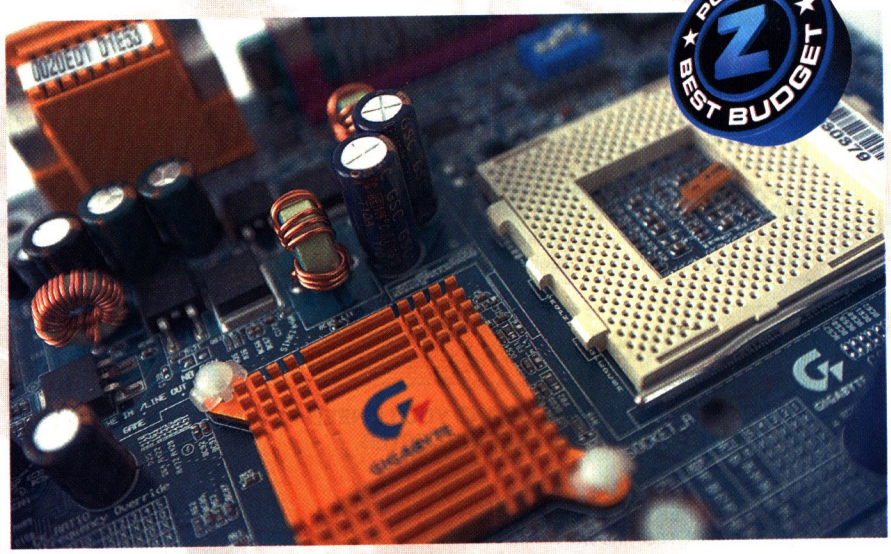
It has a rather more compact design than the Asus board, and also has a heatsink rather than a fan to cool the Northbridge chipset, which should be popular among users who want to keep the noise down.

Despite the lack of RAID, this is a feature-packed board. LAN services are supplied by a Realtek 10/100 chipset, and though there are only 2 USB slots on the back panel, a backing plate extension is supplied with a further pair. This is as far as it goes however, though not many people need more than four USB devices connected at once.

Like the Asus, the Gigabyte board offers 5PCI slots and three DIMM slots with a maximum of 3Gb RAM accepted, though it only has a 4X/2X AGP slot. Mind you, as mentioned above, AGP Pro is an unnecessary luxury for gamers. The slot is also supplied with a proper card retention bracket, a useful addition as AGP cards have a habit of popping out just when you least expect it.

Audio services are supplied by an old but trusted Creative four-channel chipset with three connectors on the back panel. Interestingly, the Line-in connector can be switched to output the rear channel, or alternatively the digital S/P-DIF signal for passing a DVD soundtrack to an appropriately equipped AV amplifier. You can connect the CD-ROM to the motherboard, but no other internal audio devices such as MPEG cards or modems.

The board performed very stably in testing, with no restart problems in Windows XP. However, until we downloaded the latest BIOS, the USB mouse refused to play ball in Windows XP, the cursor appearing to be swimming through treacle. After the upgrade, all was hunky-dory. The BIOS and jumper settings also allow some over-clocking.

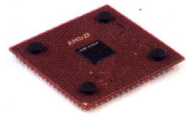


Benchmarking revealed the motherboard to be slower than the Asus A7V266-E, though not by a massive margin. But then for nearly £50 less, what do you expect? However, with a superfast Athlon, this is going to offer great performance for gamers, and given the on-board Ethernet and audio, is quite simply blinding value for money. No wonder this has become our new Best Budget board – replacing, as it happens, another Gigabyte product...

PCZONE VERDICT 84

Fabulous performance at a bargain price

MSI K7N420 PRO



■ Manufacturer: MicroStar International | Street Price: £130 inc VAT | Phone: N/A | Website www.msi.com.tw

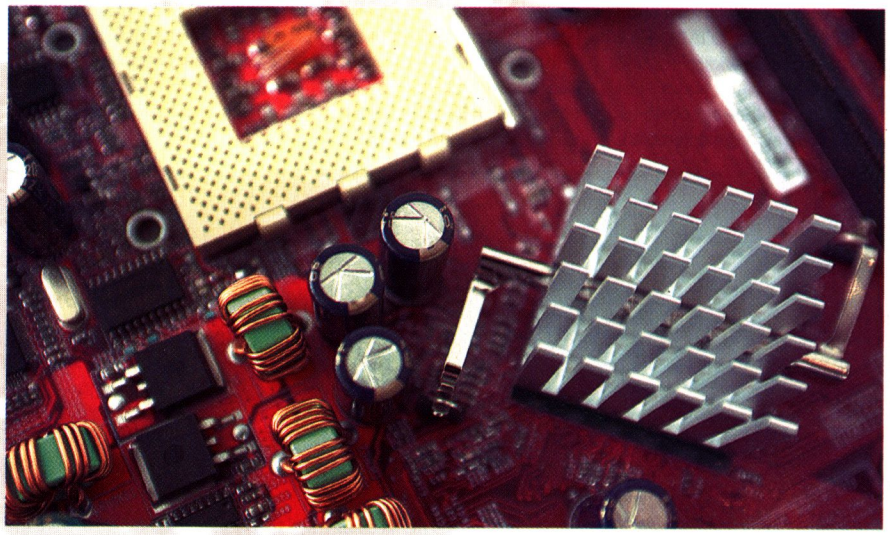
We actually tested the NVIDIA Reference Board to begin with, but at the last minute the MSI production board featuring the 420D chipset arrived. After a frantic 24 hours testing, we've managed to squeeze it in.

The MSI comes with a veritable cornucopia of features, though check as many of these are optional. The board features 3 DIMM slots – if you use identical DDR RAM sticks in slots 1 and 2, it will use the dual 64-bit TwinBank feature for faster memory performance, although this is not documented in the manual. There are 2 USB slots on board, plus a further 4 on brackets. One of these (called the D-Bracket) also features a unique troubleshooting LED display on the spine – different combinations of LEDs indicate what is happening while the PC is booting. A CNR card for S-Video and Composite Video out and a back plate for audio S/P-DIF out were also bundled. Audio quality is excellent.

The initial BIOS proved awful in performance, but once we upgraded to 2.3 from the MSI website, things fair zipped along. You have to follow the BIOS upgrade instructions to the letter (including removing your power cord when clearing the BIOS) and we had great problems when using the Performance Default BIOS settings. Once we used the conservative default and cranked up the settings carefully one at a time, the board tested and benchmarked properly.

Our tests showed the nForce chipset in an excellent light, more so than many other earlier reviews you may have read elsewhere. This is almost certainly due to the extensive BIOS and driver tweaking performed by NVIDIA since the initial reference samples were released for review.

For those looking to replace an outdated board and associated components, nForce is extremely attractive. Not only is an MX-class GeForce 2 GPU integrated, but there is also a full 5.1 Dolby Digital audio processor built into the Southbridge, accessible via ACR/CNR.



Benchmarks show remarkably similar results to boards based on the Via KT266A, but with generally improved performance in the 3DMark 2001 suite and OpenGL. As this is what you gamers need to fuel framerates, nForce is now *ZONE*'s chipset of choice and the K7N420 Pro now receives a deserved Best Buy recommendation. You effectively get a free MX card thrown in – even better news if your old card is sub-GeForce 2 speed.

PCZONE VERDICT 89

The OpenGL and DirectX 8.1 master

BEFORE YOU BUY

BEFORE YOU REACH FOR A NEW MOTHERBOARD AND PROCESSOR, THERE ARE A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER...

1 Will you need a new power supply unit (PSU)? Athlons and Pentium 4s both need at least 300W PSUs, and the P4 requires an ATX12V power supply with an extra power lead for connection to the motherboard.

2 Is your memory compatible? Unless you already have DDR RAM, you'll need to replace your old Single Data Rate SDRAM with DDR memory. Go to www.crucial.com/uk and check the specification of memory you need.

3 Is your case ATX specification? If it's an old AT-style case, you'll need to replace it.

4 Have you got the right fan and fan assembly? Pentium 4s tend to ship with processor fans, but if you're buying an Athlon XP, make sure you have an AMD approved fan – see www.amd.com for lists.

5 Will your bank manager approve? Buying the fastest processor available usually doesn't offer as much bang for your buck as a couple of steps below the top rank.

6 Will my old devices all work with the new motherboard? For example, if you have an ISA soundcard, it's not much use in a PCI slot – you're going to need a new one.

7 Will the motherboard fit my case? Even if you have an ATX case, occasionally there are motherboards/fan assemblies that may not work with your case design.

8 If you are just upgrading your processor, double check the maximum clockspeed the motherboard will take. Look on the BIOS download pages rather than the spec sheets – often these aren't updated, so specify slower processor speeds than are actually permitted.

9 Check the socket types carefully. You'll look pretty silly with a processor that doesn't have the same number of pins as the motherboard has holes...

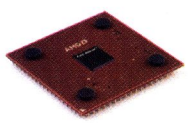
THE PROCESSORS

BUY ONE OF THOSE BOARDS AND YOU'LL NEED TO BUY A PROCESSOR AS WELL. HERE ARE THE ONES WE TESTED...

PROCESSOR **Pentium 4 2.2GHz**
MANUFACTURER **Intel**
STREET PRICE **£580, inc VAT**
PHONE **01793 403000**
WEBSITE **www.intel.com**



PROCESSOR **Athlon XP 2000+**
MANUFACTURER **AMD**
STREET PRICE **£265, inc VAT**
PHONE **N/A**
WEBSITE **www.amd.com**



THANKS TO CRUCIAL!

TRY RUNNING A MOTHERBOARD AND PROCESSOR TEST WITHOUT MEMORY AND YOU'D BE SHAFTED...

This month's motherboard round-up was only possible thanks to support from Crucial, memory suppliers extraordinaire, who provided a massive 1Gb of DDR SDRAM for testing to ensure maximum performance. Its website is the best starting place for checking memory compatibility with your motherboard, thanks to the Crucial Memory Selector. Heck, you can even buy memory there if it takes your fancy. Head over to www.crucial.com/uk and try it for yourself, and watch out for our upcoming feature on just how much RAM you need for modern gaming.

Thanks also to the combined force of Intel, AMD, Gigabyte and NVIDIA for help and components in equal measure. Without you none of this would have been possible.

TESTING, TESTING... ONE TWO THREE... FOUR

ALL FOUR BOARDS ARE PUT THROUGH TORTURE TESTING BY THE RESIDENT HARDWARE GIMP...

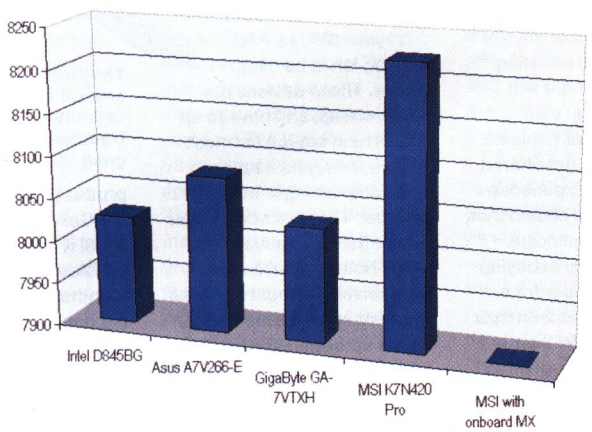
It was immediately clear from testing that these are high-performance processors in high-performance boards. However, we feel that the 2.2GHz Pentium 4 would benefit from an Intel 850-based board twinned with high-performance RDRAM. However, it still managed blistering performance in Quake III Arena and as the motherboard review reveals, still has plenty to offer as an all-round platform.

Most of the tests were slugged out between the two motherboards featuring the Via KT266A chipset and NVIDIA's nForce. In all bar one of the Open GL SPECviewperf tests, nForce led the way or drew. While most of the benchmarks you'll read online show KT266A a few per cent ahead, we reckon this is down to earlier nForce BIOSes. NVIDIA has worked tirelessly to improve performance, and tests bear this out. It achieved a narrow lead over the Asus board in the 3D Mark 2001 default benchmark with a Ti500 plugged in, though of course the internal GeForce2 MX processor struggled to keep up, scoring a meagre 2276 compared with 8227 for Ti500.

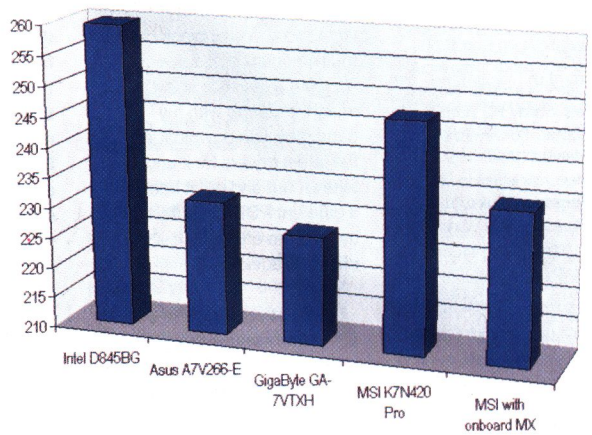
SiSoft Sandra tests showed the nForce to be similar to KT266A, though the latter pipped it to the post on the faster Asus board – the Gigabyte board was slightly slower all round. Interestingly, SiSoft reported the clockspeed of the Pentium 4 as 2.19GHz, though the BIOS reported correctly at 2.2GHz. Note that using SSE2, the Pentium 4 creamed the Whetstone Floating Point tests, though it was vastly slower without SSE2 assistance. This indicates that unless your games are optimised for Pentium 4, they're likely to run somewhat slower as FPU speed is vital for 3D work. At a recent meeting with Intel, the company showed the extent of its evangelical activity with games developers, so expect an increasing number of games supporting the technology in the near future.

Finally we arrive at *Quake III Arena*. We actually used the lowest resolution and quality settings in order to ensure that it was the motherboard and processor that was stressed supplying the GPU, rather than the benchmarks being limited by the memory bandwidth of the graphics card itself. For some reason, the Pentium 4 excelled in this test, with nForce following and KT266A bringing up the rear. As the low resolution didn't stress even the GeForce 2 MX, the efficiency of the nForce IGP 6x implementation is clear as the MX actually outperformed the Ti500 seated in the KT266A motherboards.

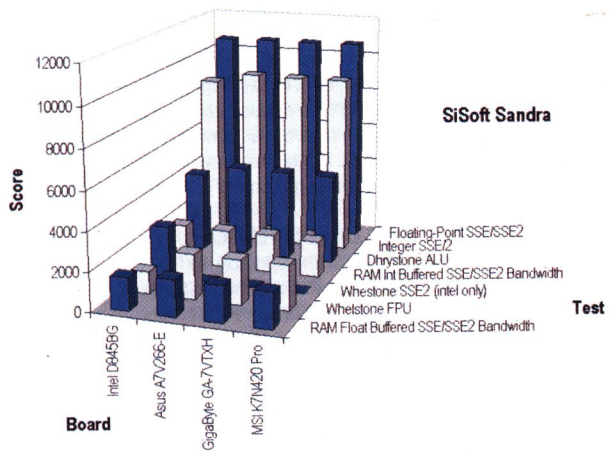
3D Mark 2001



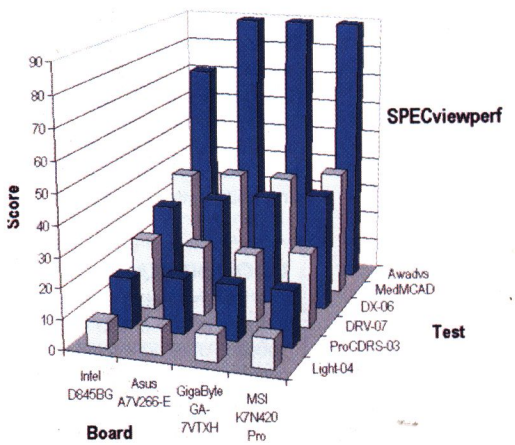
Quake 3 Arena



SiSoft Sandra



SPECviewperf



GLOSSARY

A FEW OF THE THINGS MOTHER DIDN'T TEACH YOU AT PUBERTY

Rambus/RDRAM Rambus Dynamic Random Access Memory – an expensive but fast RAM technology used by high-end P4 systems and sitting in RIMM (Rambus Inline Memory Module) slots.

DDR Double Data Rate – refers to SDRAM that supports data transfers on both the rising and falling edges of each clock cycle, effectively doubling the memory's data throughput.

SDRAM Synchronous Dynamic Random Access Memory – currently the standard used in most PCs.

GPU Graphics Processing Unit – like a CPU on a graphics card.

FPU Floating Point Unit – used to speed floating point calculations.

DIMM Dual Inline Memory Module – the standard used for modern SDRAM.

CNR Communication/Networking Riser – this is a motherboard slot specification developed by Intel to allow cheap integration of audio, modem and networking connections. Remember this is only going to work if the motherboard chipset can actually provide these services.

ACR Advanced Communication Riser – a potential rival to Intel's CNR with a larger PCI-type slot.



DEAR WANDY

A problem aired is a problem repaired. So don't be bashful, tell Wandy your troubles and he'll sort you out

CARRY ON DOCTOR: Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Send us a query or a top tip and you could pocket £50.
Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us, and we, in turn, may well share it with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type-thing. And as an extra incentive, we're offering a cool £50 to the reader who sends in the most interesting query or a top tip. No, really.
Write to Dear Wandy, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD
Email Address your letters to us at **letters@pczone.co.uk** with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'
Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

GONE DOTTY

Q I recently bought a Jetway Wonder 5000-TNT2 M64 graphics card for around £30. I have successfully installed it and have had it running fine until recently. I've been seeing large quantities of black or multicoloured dots appearing all over the screen, and it's really interfering with my gameplay. I've downloaded the latest drivers for it and even taken it out and put it back into a different PCI slot, but this has had no effect. Can you offer any advice?

Matt

A I'd never heard of Jetway Information Company Ltd before reading your message, and decided to take a quick gander at its website. The home page at www.jetway.com.tw declared YOU ARE THE VISITORS and asked that I should be USING 800x600 RESOLUTION FOR BEST BROWSING CONDITION, and after frowning through countless pages of short-circuited English served up at the speed of a barnacle I gave up. To cut a long story short: your Wonder 5000 card is almost certainly defective, and you should take it back. Bizarre symptoms such as the ones you describe are not the fault of software; the fact that you tried inserting the card into different PCI slots suggests that your motherboard is not to blame. By the way, if you get offered a refund, take it. Experience over the years has shown that, while there are significant savings to be made in buying peripherals from countries who stir-fry poodles with their noodles, more often than not you end up disappointed and wish you'd bought one from Uncle Sam.

NOISY FAN

Q I have a problem. Every other time I turn on, my PC there is a noise like barber's clippers. The odd thing is that when I shut down and turn my PC off and then back on it goes away. I've come up with two possibilities: one is that it might be that my motherboard battery has gone flat, and the other is that it might be my one-year-old 20Gb hard drive. Please help.

Padsta

A I reckon this is either your CPU or PSU cooling fan in its death throes. These devices are small, cheap, and have to sit near a heat source for most of their lives, and hearing one complaining is nothing unusual. They get noisier over time, often so gradually you won't notice it, but as with hard drives the most stressful moment in a fan's life is when it fires up from rest – and that's when you'll hear if it needs changing. In considering its replacement, bear in mind that if you have a beefy processor, temperature is critical to your whole setup, so don't go skimping on the cheapest one you can find. On average, ball-bearing fans outlast sleeve-bearing fans by more than 50 percent. For some ideas look at www.coolpc.co.uk.

VOODOO MAGIC

£50 WINNER!

Last month posed a question: Why can't you enable AGP texturing on a Voodoo3 3000 AGP card? It's because the Voodoo3 does not implement any AGP features. It merely uses the AGP bus like a faster version of PCI, but without implementing AGP texturing or side-band addressing. This is why there was never a huge difference between the PCI and AGP performance when run at the same clock speed; they both run entirely from onboard video memory once data has initially been loaded. AGP texturing is where a card transparently uses main memory as an extension of video memory. Traditional use of main memory to store overflowed textures would mean they would have to be fetched into video memory from main memory before they could be worked on. Lack of this feature is not a big deal, since the main memory isn't anywhere near as fast as video memory anyway, and so cards with AGP texturing would still slow down greatly if that feature was used much. Voodoo3 was unique in not implementing AGP features since 3dfx assumed that these features were irrelevant due to unacceptable performance penalties at the time.

Mark Petty

Mark also used correct English in his email and was witty to boot. The Wandy Coffers have never opened quite so quickly.



Seeing spots? Either a Dalmatian has slipped between you and your monitor, or your video card is on the fritz.

HELLO TO HALO

Q I want to upgrade my PC and would like to keep my existing motherboard – but not if it means jerk-o-vision on the eagerly awaited *Unreal II* and *Halo*. My Panrix PC is an Asus K7M Slot A Motherboard, Athlon 600MHz, 384Mb RAM running Windows 98. I am already saving for my GeForce3 card and wondered if you could please advise me as to whether I can just upgrade the processor or, if not, what you would recommend.

Peter Andrews

A The K7M was the first real, balls-on Athlon motherboard. I reckon a lightly clocked 1GHz Athlon will do you nicely, plus a GeForce3 Ti200. You could wait around for the fire-breathing Ti500, which is the meanest, most bad-ass display card yet produced, and with news of the GeForce4 release (see p108) it may well drop in price considerably over the next few months. Oh, and I'd certainly ditch that creaking copy of Windows 98 and go the Windows 2000 route. When all is said and done, though, both *Unreal II* and *Halo* look like they need at the very minimum a GeForce3 and Pentium 4 before you get a half-decent frame rate. If it weren't for games publishers, we'd all be perfectly happy tapping out our letters on a 486 DX100...



The GeForce3 is so powerful, several major airlines are using it in place of more traditional jet engines. A good idea... not.

PIII KINGS

Q I'm thinking of upgrading my Celeron 600 to a Pentium III 1GHz. At the moment I have 128Mb RAM and am going to upgrade it to 384Mb in the near future. I also have a GeForce2 MX-400. My motherboard is an ABIT VL6. My games run OK at the moment, but will upgrading to 1GHz and 384Mb RAM make my games run any faster? Will there be a big difference from a Celeron 600 to 1GHz?

Jaz

A I don't think increasing the RAM in your PC will have any impact on current games, although this will probably change with next-gen titles like *Unreal II*. At the moment, memory counts when you're rendering complex images in 3DStudio, editing large audio files in SoundForge, or cropping a giant bitmap in Photoshop, but

"I bit the bullet and bought XP thinking that would do the trick. Guess what? It still crashes"

ALEX

for gamers it isn't really much of an issue. Nobody who uses their PC for gaming should need more than 256Mb RAM in his or her PC, so if I were you I'd save my money. However, there's little doubt that you'll be chuffed at the money you spent on a faster processor. Looking back at some past benchmarks, it's clear that the 600 chip you have now is noticeably slower than even the 700MHz PIII, so a trip to 1GHz will be one you'll remember. Plus that GeForce2 will be able to really make its presence felt.

HOTCH PATCH

Q I've got all the games – *Counter-Strike*, *Kingpin* and *Operation Flashpoint* to name a few – but with the exception of *Delta Force 3: Land Warrior* I am unable to get online



Mike Elton finds patches are getting too big. Maybe he should consider using chewing gum or nasal spray.

and shoot my fellow gamers. I use GameSpy to locate servers, as recommended by the manufacturers. I'm out of luck because shortly after releasing titles, developers add various patches and modifications that make the game in its original format unusable. Is this actually the case? Trying to use the Internet to download the latest version of *Counter-Strike* takes about two hours, and I'm afraid my ISP closes down with any download of that duration. Is there a solution to this problem?

Mike Elton

A First off, I'd get rid of that awful GameSpy nonsense and install The All-Seeing Eye from www.udpsoft.com/eye instead. Why? Suck it and see. Now on to the games themselves. You're entirely correct about updates, fixes and patches causing headaches for modem users with 'bought' versions. While there are some servers running backdated copies of popular titles (chiefly *Counter-Strike* lunatics who believe the aged beta releases outclass the current version), the vast majority run the latest code and you'll have to upgrade to play on them. The one-step patches themselves aren't actually too large, being around 17Mb or so, but if you have to make a major leap between versions you could be talking 80Mb or more. When all is said and done, you need to update, so get yourself a download manager like NetAnts or GetRight (both of which allow you to drop your connection and carry on later), or keep your eyes peeled in the newsagents for the latest copy of *ZONE*. We always bundle the latest patches on the coverdisc or you can find them all online in our patch database on www.pczone.co.uk.

POOCESSOR

Q I have a 500MHz K6-2 and 256MB RAM. I recently bought a GeForce2 GTS to replace my old RIVA TNT2, but didn't notice a significant improvement in performance. I think this may be because my processor is causing a bottleneck. I bought my GeForce card at a bargain £75, so should I flog it, wait for components to come down in value and build a new system, or is there something that I can do with my current machine?

James Wigby

A Your processor is definitely holding you back. Spend a little money on a new motherboard and processor – a brand new Abit KT7A and AMD Duron 900MHz can be yours for around £150 – and you'll notice the difference. Hold onto that GeForce2.

SOUNDS XPENSIVE

Q My PC is starting to annoy me. Over the years I have spent plenty of cash on it, and now it's getting ridiculous. I have a T-Bird 1GHz, 512Mb RAM, an Asus 8200 Deluxe GeForce3, a Sound Blaster Audigy Platinum, Windows XP and a SCSI Advansys with external HDD and internal CDRW BPRec. It's all powered by a 230V PSU and the disk drives have coolers. When I bought the GeForce3 I was running Windows 98 and continually suffered blue screens, so I bought XP thinking it would do the trick. Guess what? It still crashes and I'm getting new errors mentioning FastFat.sys. Can you please help?

Alex

A If I deal with the FastFat.sys error first, this should be cured by visiting windowsupdate.microsoft.com and downloading all the XP updates. Second, your PSU is on the weedy side. For all that clobber you need at least 300W. Personally speaking, I don't actually like XP and I'm not sure I ever will. I loathe its infantile interface and that the installer won't let you configure it without the hatefully glossy Disney effects. The operating system for business? Don't make me laugh. On the day it shipped, Microsoft posted bug fixes, compatibility updates and patches totalling more than 18Mb. I've yet to find a good reason to change from NT.

GRAPHICAL BHP

Q Everywhere I look, everyone is talking about fast graphics cards as though they're the heart and soul of every system. The thing is, there doesn't seem to be any way of testing and stamping a card so everyone knows for sure which one the fastest one is. When you buy a PC you know roughly how well it will perform, because manufacturers all talk in megahertz. But when I see video card boxes in stores, I have absolutely no way of finding out whether the one I'm looking at is terrific or terrible. How can I tell?

Matt



It looks fast and powerful but how can you really tell?

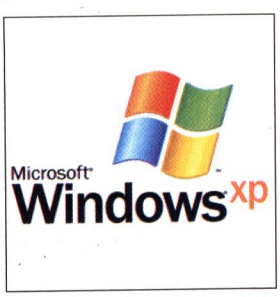
A Short answer: you can't. Graphics cards are like hot hatches. On the outside they shout for your attention, with fat heat sinks, huge fans, mad colour schemes and macho names (Annihilator, Pulverizer and so on). To find out how they perform out of their boxes and inside your PC, keep an eye on *PC ZONE*'s own hardware reviews and, most importantly, on our Buyer's Guide shortlists. For road tests showing how the cards perform alongside each other there are a number of sources out on the web. Firm favourites include www.anandtech.com and www.tomshardware.com. You can also benchmark systems yourself: check out SiSoftware Sandra at www.sisoftware.co.uk and 3Dmark 2001 on our cover DVD. For news of the new GeForce4 cards, see our special report on p108.

ROLL YOUR OWN

Q Most of my mates buy known brand PCs from high street retailers and I don't remember any of them experiencing any trouble. I've always built my own PC but seem to run into grief, whether it's failing fans, dodgy memory or graphics cards that aren't compatible with my setup. Is building your own computer from separates really the best way? I'm thinking about saving up some pennies and buying something like a Dell. What do you think?

Twister

A Tricky. I have a mixture of home-brew kit and brand names scattered around, and I can't say if one type is more reliable than the other. Known names I've used in the past include Dell, Fujitsu, HP and IBM, and the only thing I have against them is they each have a branded version of Windows brandishing a corporate identity when you start up. If you've had trouble with components you've bought separately, try a different supplier. If you trust your supplier, try a change of manufacturer. In over a decade of putting my own boxes together, I always stick to kit I recognise: Creative Labs and Yamaha (sound), Hercules (video), Gigabyte and Intel (mother-boards), IBM (HDs), Sony (floppy), Kingston (NIC), Pioneer (DVD), and Mitsubishi (monitors). Also, our Buyer's Guide shows the stuff we've tested. Build a box from this lot and I don't think you can go far wrong.



Windows 2000 in Tellytubby la-la Land?

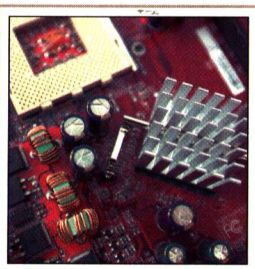
SPONSORED BY crucial TECHNOLOGY A Division of Micron
The Memory Experts™

BUYER'S GUIDE

Are you looking to upgrade your PC? Since we've started this Buyer's Guide, prices have dropped consistently every month – and we'll keep on checking to ensure that this guide gives you the most accurate and up-to-date information. While we're on the subject, memory is dirt cheap as well – if you're still labouring with less than 128Mb RAM, buy some now

◀ BEST BUY

MOTHERBOARD

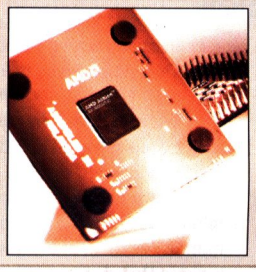


MSI K7N420 PRO

STREET PRICE £118 inc VAT
TELEPHONE N/A
MANUFACTURER MicroStar International
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

The Asus A7V266-E just gets edged off its deserved plinth by a motherboard featuring the NVIDIA nForce 420D chipset. In testing, the board showed superb performance in the crucial OpenGL and DirectX 8.1 tests. It has a number of optional extras, so check with the retailer what to expect in the box you buy – integrated LAN, additional USB slots, TV out and digital audio out are all available. Bear in mind that if you have an old video card, you may not need a new one with this board – it has a GeForce 2 MX class GPU integrated into the Northbridge... for free! Bit of a bonus...

PROCESSOR



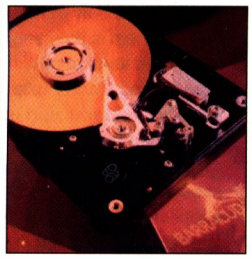
AMD ATHLON XP 1700+

NOW £119 WAS £129

STREET PRICE £119 inc VAT
TELEPHONE N/A
MANUFACTURER AMD
WEBSITE www.amd.com

The Athlon XP processors are named after the clockspeed of Intel processors it claims to beat. The 1700+ actually runs at a clockspeed of 1.47GHz, and with new so-called QuantiSpeed architecture, more on-chip cache and souped-up 3DNow! instruction set, it offers superb performance in a range of applications – not least games. While the 2000 is currently the fastest processor in the range, the 1700+ is good value for money. Ensure your Socket A motherboard has an updated BIOS and correctly rated components to run an XP processor before you fork out.

HARD DRIVE



SEAGATE BARRACUDA ATA IV 60GB

NOW £98 WAS £113

STREET PRICE £98 inc VAT
TELEPHONE 01628 890 366
MANUFACTURER Seagate
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

We have a new Best Buy hard drive – the 60Gb Seagate Barracuda ATA IV. The IBM Deskstar 75GXP drives are looking a bit long in the tooth alongside this modern beastie. Although it's a 7,200 RPM drive, it runs both cooler and quieter than its peers, which can only be a good thing. Fully loaded with a 2Mb cache, the performance is solid across the board, both in terms of average seek times and sustained data throughput. We recommend the 60Gb drive on the basis that it seems pretty good value for money, though the range also offers 20, 40 and 80Gb variants.

MONITOR



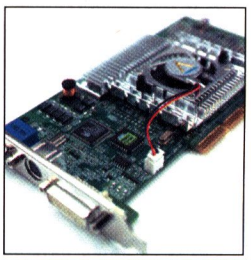
IIYAMA VM PRO 512 22IN

NOW £633 WAS £652

STREET PRICE £633
TELEPHONE 01438 745482
MANUFACTURER iiyama
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Our long-standing Best Buy monitor, the VM Pro 510, is superseded by the 512. Equipped with the latest Mitsubishi aperture grille Diamondtron screen, it has a rather smaller viewable area than suggested, closer to 20 inches than 22, but gives outstanding results at resolutions up to 2048x1536 at 85Hz – something many graphics cards can't even support. If your video card has the bandwidth, you can rely on this monitor to give you pin-sharp results at 1600x1200. There's also the useful inclusion of a four-port USB hub as well as a pair of speakers – even if they do sound a bit tinny.

GRAPHICS CARD



CREATIVE LABS GEFORCE 3 TITANIUM 500

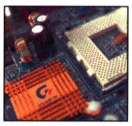
NOW £276 WAS £294

STREET PRICE £276 inc VAT
TELEPHONE N/A
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

Of the 'new' Titanium products from NVIDIA, the pick of the bunch is the 500, as it's the only one that gives better performance than its predecessor, the plain ol' GeForce 3. The core clock has been upped to 240MHz from 200MHz, and the memory now runs at 500MHz (DDR) as opposed to 460MHz. Not only that, but the new 0.15 micron manufacturing process makes the cards cheaper to produce too. Creative's clearly blasted ahead in the latest round of *ZONE* bench tests – and since we've yet to see the new Radeon cards, they're not even part of the picture...

BEST BUDGET ▶

MOTHERBOARD

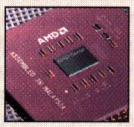


GIGABYTE GA-7VTXH

STREET PRICE £90 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE 01908 362700
WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk

Usurps another great Gigabyte board – this one is a great Via KT266A-based DDR solution. Integrated on board are both 10/100 LAN and four-channel audio from Creative, and yet it costs less than a ton. In testing it proved stable and among the faster DDR boards for Athlon. A complete bargain.

PROCESSOR



DURON 1000

NOW £52 WAS £55

STREET PRICE £52
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com

Durons are basically Athlons with smaller Level 2 (L2) processor caches. This still compares favourably with Intel's ageing Celeron chip cache structure. Besides, Duron still has the blistering Floating Point Unit (FPU) mathematical calculation speed, making it a top processor for gamers.

HARD DRIVE



XXSEAGATE U SERIES 6 40GB

STREET PRICE £70 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890366
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

The U Series 5 drives are now pretty much unavailable, but is replaced in the Buyer's Guide by its own replacement. The U Series 6 drive has much the same spec as the Series 5, but runs quieter and cooler. We've also uprated capacity to 40Gb – great value.

MONITOR

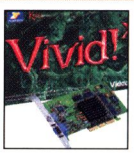


HANSOL 710P 17IN

STREET PRICE £151 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hansol
TELEPHONE 01252 360400
WEBSITE www.hansol-uk.com

For the budget-conscious gamer, Hansol is a company well worth a look. With a fabulously low price, it will handle 1024x768 with a vertical refresh rate of 85Hz, and 1600x1200 at a creditable 75Hz. There's not a lot that'll touch this for the money.

GRAPHICS CARD



VIDEOLOGIC VIVID!XS 32MB

NOW £67 WAS £80

STREET PRICE £67 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER VideoLogic
TELEPHONE 01923 277488
WEBSITE www.videologic.com

The new Kyro II chipset blows its slower Kyro brethren to smithereens at 175MHz clock speed. The 32Mb Vivid!XS replaces the Hercules 3D Prophet 4500 as Best Budget Buy – but only just, there's barely anything to choose between the two.

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HERCULES GAMESURROUND FORTISSIMO II

STREET PRICE £36 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hercules
TELEPHONE (020) 8686 5600
WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com

This four-channel audio card represents excellent value for money and its DirectSound 3D support is gib-tastic. You can even get four channels of surround sound from your DVD movies with a special version of PowerDVD!



MICROSOFT GAMEVOICE USB

STREET PRICE £49.99 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder/

So how can a set of budget headphones cost more than our Best Buy? It's simple really – the GameVoice enables you to talk to your mates over the Internet. It works very well, and as they double as a more than decent set of headphones, they're a bit of a bargain.



TEAC CDW58EK 8X8X32

STREET PRICE £72 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Teac
TELEPHONE 01923 225235
WEBSITE www.teac.co.uk

I've just had to buy a load of CD/RW drives and these Teac drives were dead cheap, easy to install and have worked without a hitch. Bearing in mind my first CD-RW drive cost me well over £250 and was flaky and slow, these babies are a good deal. Shop around and you're laughing...



SAITEK CYBORG 3D GOLD

STREET PRICE £45
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.co.uk

Saitek's current generation of sticks are fabulous. The Cyborg Gold is a top-line USB stick that excels across the board. The design is superb, both strong and adjustable – even lefties are catered for – and its response and accuracy are unequalled, even among more pricey competition.



SIDEWINDER PLUG 'N' PLAY

STREET PRICE £12
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE (0870) 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder/

Four buttons, two triggers, directional pad, USB. Dead simple, dead effective and really rather cheap. The Plug 'n' Play Gamepad is the new basic controller from the Seattle Sidewinders and comes in funky transparent plastic, in contrast to the gloomy black pads of yesteryear.



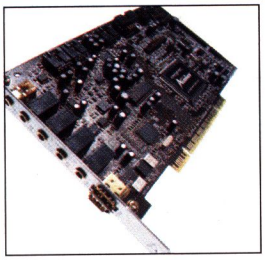
HERCULES XPS210

STREET PRICE £40 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hercules
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com

This small but perfectly formed 2.1 speaker set is cheap – but doesn't sound it. With tone controls and stereo enhancement, it's an ideal solution for desktop gaming. The satellites and subwoofer are well matched, giving a decent overall sound. And adorned in royal blue, it looks the part too...

BEST BUY ▶

SOUNDCARDS



CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY PLAYER

STREET PRICE £82 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The SonicFury gets pipped to the post by the excellent new Audigy Player from Creative Labs. Successor to the very successful Sound Blaster Live! series, the Audigy has an audio engine four times as powerful, excellent audio quality, and a range of features that makes it the most versatile all-round gaming/music/DVD soundcard. EAX Advanced HD adds a range of new 3D audio features, though it'll be a while before games filter through with support for the more esoteric options. It's about £20 more expensive than its main competition, but we reckon it's well worth it.

HEADPHONES

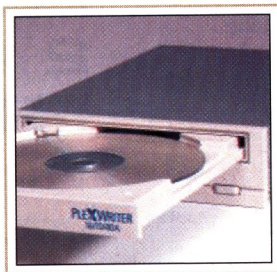


SENNHEISER HD 200 MASTER

STREET PRICE £45
MANUFACTURER Sennheiser
TELEPHONE 01494 551 551
WEBSITE www.sennheiser.co.uk

This German audio company has been around for more than 50 years, founded by the suitably Teutonic-sounding Dr Fritz Sennheiser. The HD200s are actually targeted at DJs, and for good reason. They're very, very loud. They're very, very strong. They have a closed back design, meaning you can hear nearby rocket jumpers comfortably while her indoors has *EastEnders* turned up high enough so she can hear it from the kitchen. And, crucially for extended gaming sessions, they're comfortable and light, weighing around 140g. A great pair of cans at a top price – what you waiting for?

CDRW DRIVES



PLEXTOR 16/10/40A

STREET PRICE £115 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Plextor
TELEPHONE +32 2 725 5522
WEBSITE www.plextor.com

We've been running Plextor CDs, DVDs and CD-Rs for years in our machines and they're a) bulletproof and b) fast as anything you'll get within a few quid of the asking price. This is a drive that is dead fast, offers Sanyo Burnproof technology and is competitively priced alongside some good contenders from Yamaha and Mirai. It comes with WinOnCD (nowhere near as good as Nero but proven) and offers CD-R, CD-RW and fast CD-Read performance. I'd upgrade, but my ancient SCSI 6x Plextor CD-R still cuts the mustard – three years on...

JOYSTICKS



MICROSOFT SIDEWINDER FORCEFEEDBACK 2

STREET PRICE £62 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/products/hardware/sidewinder/sidewinder.htm

Force-feedback products aren't everyone's cup of tea, but nothing comes close to the SideWinder FF2. It's a huge, heavy tabletop affair, with the power transformer built into the base. An infrared sensor causes the stick to leap to attention when you grasp it, which might be a bit startling, but is still rather good. The force-feedback routines work extremely well – mainly because the motors are so powerful. If more games made better use of the technology, it would be a must-have piece of gear.

GAMEPADS



THRUSTMASTER FIRESTORM DUAL-POWER GAMEPAD

STREET PRICE £26
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE (020) 8686 5600
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

We may not be that fond of Thrustmaster's joysticks, but this force feedback joypad and its non-force feedback cousin, the Firestorm Dual Analogue, are superbly designed. The Firestorm Dual Power sports no fewer than 13 control buttons, not to mention the twin analogue directional hats. As a result, it's one of the most versatile controllers on the market, equally at home with arcade-style games that need digital pads or flight sims requiring more progressive analogue control. Also included is Thrustmapper software that allows you to customise its behaviour in any game. Delicious, especially at this price.

SPEAKERS



KLIPSCH PROMEDIA 4.1

STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER Klipsch
TELEPHONE 0031 314 383 699
WEBSITE www.klipsch.com

Take your pick for Best Buy between the stunning Klipsch 4.1 THX-approved speakers and the cheaper long-term favourites Sirocco Crossfire from Videologic. Both represent great value for money, but the Klipsch edge it in the listenability stakes, hence their new entry here. They're beautifully made, sound amazing and are the first speakers that can split your ears just as well as the Crossfires. You'll find no better speaker set-up for watching DVDs and playing games on PC.

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- Operation Flashpoint
- Deus Ex
- Severance: Blade of Darkness
- Colin McRae Rally 2.0
- Half-Life: Uplink
- Z: Steel Soldiers
- Zeus: Master of Olympus
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Over 6 months' worth of Extended Play patches and add-ons, so you can get more from your favourites. Featuring extras for **Black & White, Unreal Tournament, The Sims** and many, many more. PLUS the top 5 Modwatch files over the past year, including **Wanted! The Half-Life Western Pack** – YEEEEEEE-HAW!

All gifts subject to availability. Allow 28 days for delivery. Please note that Windows 95 is required for most programs on the FREE CD ROMs and that most of them have limited functionality.

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ALL CHANGE



■ **PROUD MUM** Rhianna Pratchett

It was a long labour but I'm proud to announce the birth of a brand new bouncing baby section. Weighing in at a whopping 26 pages, the young Extended Play replaces the wrinkly old End Zone and promises to fill your life with gaming sunshine. It's also under instructions not keep you up all night and give you chaffed nipples (unless you actually like to sleep underneath your issues).

The first difference you'll notice is that we've got rid of Cheatmaster and Dear Rhianna, although we'll be bringing you even more cheats on our cover CDs and DVDs next month in a special offline version of CheatStation, the largest cheat database on the Net (which you can find at **www.pczone.co.uk**). In their place you'll find a brand new round-up of the best mods and editors, and everything else that's essential for prolonging the life of your games.

We've also brought in a new How To section, which will change every month from the best developer tips and gameplay strategy guides, to how to run all your old games in DOS. This month Paul Presley, a self-confessed novice when it comes to in-game editors, gets to grips with mission creating for *Operation Flashpoint*. If he can do it, you certainly can – well, that's the idea at least.

And of course we haven't forgotten those of you who go all gooey when we mention the games you loved when you were still in dufflecoats and knee-high socks. Especially for all the nostalgia-maniacs out there, we've created Rear View. This month we look at one of the games that changed the face of the gaming world forever, *Ultima Underworld*. So sit back and let us entertain you.

The battle is over, let war commence

■ www.planetwolfenstein.com

■ www.planetmedalofhonor.com

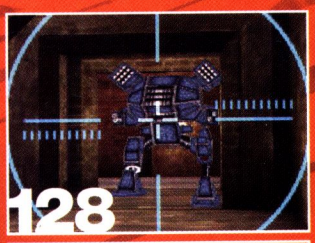


Who's going to win the modding war – *Medal Of Honor* or *Wolf*?

AS FAR AS we're concerned the superb gameplay and mission design of *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* comfortably triumphs over the graphically impressive, yet predictable *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*. Whether it can keep its name at the top of the pile long enough for it to move into folklore is a completely different issue. It's doubtful that *Half-Life*, the title *MoH: AA* shook from our number one FPS spot, would have had its longevity without the attention of dedicated modders, especially the creators of the biggest online shooter in the world, *Counter-Strike*. Mods, maps and editing tools are the single biggest factor in prolonging the continued success of a game, so although the recent battle of the FPSs has been won, for you lot out there, the war is far from over, as the race to mod and map the hell out of these two babies starts in earnest.

RTCW has already made the most of its lead time with the release of the official map pack *Trench Toast* (on this month's CD and next month's DVD) and the *RTCW* Software Development Kit. The current download for the SDK contains the level editing codes, but not the full source code, which will, according to id Software, be available for download in the not too distant future. The editing tools available include the roq video file maker and the Wolf Radiant and Q3map editors, but be warned, Radiant has a notoriously sharp learning curve. Extra juicy nuggets are already popping up, like the German voice pack (also on planetwolfenstein), which replaces all the American speech samples with German ones, and plays the German National anthem.

But *Medal Of Honor* looks like it's already hot on the tail of the *Wolf* and, despite its later release, website are already swarming with mods, skins for both weapons and players and information about Easter eggs and secret levels. There are also several blood and guts add-ons available, to combat the rather sterile and clean nature of killing. After all, warfare wouldn't be warfare without a splash of entrails and someone carrying their own arm, would it?



THE MODSQUAD
Parkas to the ready...



MAILBOX
Spill your guts



WATCHDOG
Exposing the industry



DISC PAGES
Details of the new DVD edition

Animal Crackers

■ www.planetquake.com/animal

OLD NEWS or not, *Quake III* is still one of the purest and most expandable FPSs around. One of the most original-looking mods in development is *Animal Arena*, which recently went into public beta testing. *AA* is attempting to implement class-based play into a deathmatch environment, by focusing play around six animal classes: falcon, snake, tiger, rhino, wolf and kangaroo, each with their own special abilities and weapons. While issues like character balances and skins are still being addressed, *Animal Arena* is already looking challenging for even diehard *QIII*ers. We'll have it on the discs next month.



Damage mirror and vamp tech is a seriously lethal combo.

Day of Defeat 2.0

■ www.dayofdefeatmod.com



An avalanche-damaged town is the theme of this map.

WHILE WE'RE ALL in a World War II kind of mood, what better time for the long-awaited release of *Day Of Defeat 2.0*. This second instalment of the highly acclaimed WWII-themed team-player mod for *Half-Life*, promises seven new levels, some of which are maps from the original *Day Of Defeat* with new textures and models as well as much-needed details like a clearer HUD, weapons with recoil and more detailed explosion effects. The objectives system has also been refined and looks like being one of the strongest features of the mod. Expect a review next issue as well as the full release of the mod on our DVD.

CHEATS AHOY!

We've decided that cheaters will be better served from our website. You can find all the latest cheats on the largest database on the Internet at CheatStation, which is part of www.pczone.co.uk. If you're not connected to the Internet, don't despair. From next month you'll be able to find an offline version of CheatStation on the coverdiscs, which will give you access to all the cheats released that month.

SHORTS

Spaced Out

■ freespace.volitionwatch.com

It seems unlikely there'll ever be a third *FreeSpace* game, which after a good couple of years remains one of the best space combat games available. However, the good news is that there are a handful of excellent campaigns available, for both of the *FreeSpace* games. If this lights your candle then you can find a comprehensive guide to all the extras you will ever need at http://www.space-combat.net.



Quiz Master

ON THE CD DVD

■ www.sigames.com/cmquiz/

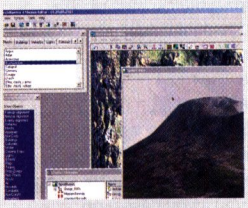
If your accumulated bank of football trivia wasn't tested enough in the original game, then this editor for *Championship Manager Quiz* allows you to add your own questions to the database, so you can correct such obvious omissions as: 'Which post-war FA Cup Final was the best?' Answer: 1987, Coventry City Vs Tottenham. (Correct – ed.) If you'd happily live and die in your football strip you can find it on this month's cover discs. If you're still hooked on the original game you can find all your essential *CM* downloads at www.thedugout.net.



Knight Writer

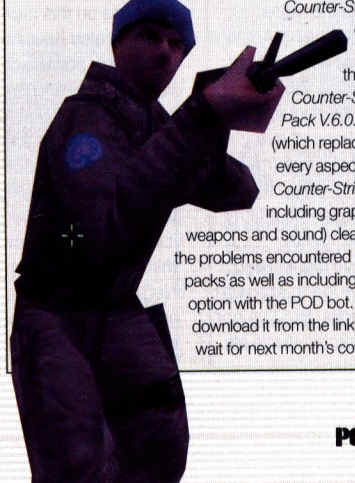
■ www.mechwarrior4.com

If you're desperate to play with big machines, then you'll no doubt be glad to know that the *MechWarrior 4 Black Knight* editor has been released. This powerful editing tool allows you to create your very own single and multiplayer missions for *MechWarrior 4*. If you think you might need some inspiration then the multiplayer-only trial version of *MWr:BK* is also on our CD and DVD.



Dazed and Confusion

■ www.games-fusion.net/cspacks.php



Counter-Strike fans everywhere are celebrating the release of the *Counter-Strike Fusion Pack V.6.0*. The pack (which replaces almost every aspect of the original *Counter-Strike* game, including graphics, models, weapons and sound) clears up some of the problems encountered in previous packs as well as including a single-player option with the POD bot. You can download it from the link above or wait for next month's coverdiscs.

THE GUIDE: HOW TO CREATE A CAMPAIGN FOR... OPERATION FLASHPOINT



If you thought programming was a tough job, you ain't seen nothing yet. *Paul Presley* begins his journey into the scary world of the mission editor



AS YOU can tell, the mag has undergone a bit of an overhaul this month. Part of this took the form of a phone call to me by Mr Woods saying they were revamping the Extended Play section and that they'd had an idea. I could hear Richie sniggering away in the background as he explained. That was when I started to get worried.

Every few months I'm to delve into a different game's mission editor or supplied editing tools. In just four days I'm supposed to go from complete novice to fairly experienced amateur game designer. The logic is sound (even if their judgement is a bit skewed). I've been playing games for years but, like most of you, I haven't got any programming experience, so what happens to me should be a pretty good approximation of what happens to you if you have a go.

The trouble is, I've tried these things before and while yes, some of them are pretty straightforward, most, like *Flashpoint* here, are more complex than decoding Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics in the dark. Which means that under no circumstances should you expect me to succeed every time. Most likely I'll end the four days as a broken mess of neuroses, weeping into a filthy corner of a local YMCA somewhere while dishevelled tramps poke me in the ribs with piss-soaked sticks. But I've got a sneaking suspicion that's all part of the big plan...

DAY ONE: BASICS

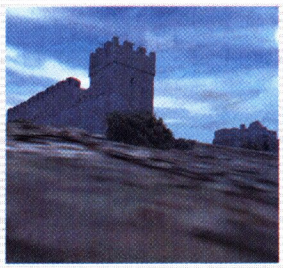
Well the plan was always for me to try and create an entire mini-campaign and on the face of it, you wouldn't have thought that would be too hard. Which is probably what the first chap to climb Mount Everest said to his team of freezing Sherpas.

Initially things look good. At the very basic level the mission editor is a breeze. In fact, most of the first day's morning is spent dropping tank platoons and infantry units onto random spots



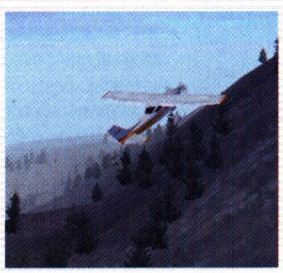
It's not marked on the map but you'll find a good airfield on Malden at location GC25, just north-east of Saint Louis.

on the map and assigning a few waypoints. (See the 'Day1' missions on this month's DVD. You can also download the files from www.pczone.co.uk and we'll be including the files on next month's CD as well.) Something's bugging me though. It's a simple enough task to create random skirmishes but there's no real cohesion to any of it. Bohemia's missions (and the third-party ones found on the Net) all seem to have storylines and agendas and objectives and complicated things like that. What am I missing?



Also hidden away, this time on Everon, is a good castle location. Grid reference HD91, map fans.

The answer's obvious and it's one I've been dreading. Staring down at me from the top of the screen are the words 'Triggers', 'Markers' and, worst of the lot, 'Synchronize'. Last time I went near any of these my brain almost filed for a trial separation. Which means, of course, that if I want to make any progress I'm going to have to start experimenting with them. I don't want to. But it's not as though I have much choice, and if it is going to happen then it's going to happen on my terms. Time for some research.



Don't forget the 'Civilians' in the unit selections. There are some pretty good vehicles to play about with including a Cessna.

"In just four days I'm supposed to go from complete novice to fairly experienced amateur game designer"

DAY TWO: ONLINE

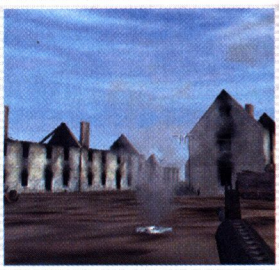
I love the Internet, me. Not only does it cater for all my perverted sexual whims in both .jpeg and .avi form, but you can find out anything you want to know about anything. Including how to make complicated missions using the Flashpoint editor.

One thing I stumbled upon was a button to switch between creating missions and cinematics. I decide to create a moody-looking piece with elite marines jumping out of low-flying Black Hawk choppers in the dead of night. I've no idea how to actually do that of course. Or how to attach them to a finished mission. Or how to provide briefings for the players or even how to end a mission properly yet, but I figure I'll burn those bridges when I come to them.

Meanwhile, I start trawling the Net for useful tips. Plenty of tutorials and the like reside at the Flashpoint Editing Centre and the chat forums on both the Web and the newsgroup provide a good source of feedback. One of the most useful things I managed to download was the Unofficial Operation Flashpoint Command Reference Manual. A weighty tome, clocking in at around 150 or so pages, but containing just about every possible command, action, string and variable in the game. Comprehensive, certainly, but it would be quicker to read *Lord of the Rings* several times. Still, mine is not to reason why, and by morning I should be ready to rock and/or roll.

DAY THREE: FRUSTRATIONS

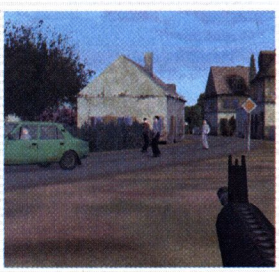
OK then, we're not going to bother with strings and



Kolgujev is well suited to *Saving Private Ryan*-style locations. Lots of burnt-out buildings and the like.

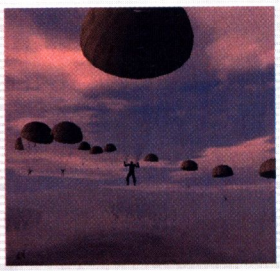
variables. If you thought James Joyce's *Ulysses* was hard-going you've obviously never tried to make sense of the Flashpoint Command Reference Manual. Of course, this probably explains why it took Bohemia Interactive several years rather than a single weekend to get it right, but that's no excuse.

The biggest problem is that it reads as though Bohemia was just making up the game's commands as they went along. Consequently it's been tricky for the dedicated fans to make



Malden and Everon are more suitable for active civilian locales. Less devastation, more vegetation.

much sense of the commands used in the official missions. There doesn't appear to be any sort of logic to anything. Plus



Parachutes can be found under the 'Air' units. Start them as 'Flying' and you can create a good way for players to enter a level.

half the commands just don't appear to work right or are completely redundant. What use are the 'Info Age' or 'Local' commands for instance?

Most of Day Three is spent trying to get those marines to jump in and out of helicopters using 'MoveInCargo', 'FlyInHeight' and 'LeaveVehicle' commands. With varying degrees of failure. The crux of it all seems to lie with the Synchronisation setting, but since this has never been adequately explained anywhere I've looked it's a case of trial and error.

After several hours of having marines jumping out of



Petrol stations make for good mission objectives as they explode real nice when you plant some satchel charges around them.

helicopters and falling to their deaths, or just as idiotically jumping out and running off in opposite directions until they fall off a large cliff or even (and this is surreal) jumping out and reappearing on top of the helicopters, trapped between the rotor blades and the roof – I decide to give up and have some fun.

Something that is easy to get the hang of is character animations. The 'PlayMove' command can be used to make units behave in all sorts of ways, while 'SetMimic' is used to alter facial animations. I may not have been able to make a dramatic intro filled with excitement and adventure, but at least I could have a line of well-hard marines salute me then start behaving like trained chimps (see 'Day3' missions on the DVD). Not a total waste then.

DAY FOUR: EPIPHANY

Eureka! Like Archimedes in the bath I've made a breakthrough. Truth be told, since I spend virtually every Friday night in a pub with a leading games designer friend of mine, it's surprising this didn't occur to me earlier. But anyway. Planning! The mistake I've been making until now is that I'm just sitting in front of the screen coming up with random ideas. Nothing's gelling. Nothing's making much sense because there's no plan. Plans are key. Plans are smart. Plans are... well-bloody hard.

I mean, you try it. You try coming up with an original gripping combat-based storyline that hasn't been done to death a million times better in a million other games. Go on, try it. See, you can't can you? (Yes – A Reader.) Still, I feel pretty good about the whole 'make a plan' thing so I'm not going to let a crippling lack of talent get in my way. Instead I'll do what every other FPS producer seems to be doing these days. I'll copy the beach-landing scene from *Saving Private Ryan*. Huzzah.

First I need to find a good beach. I've chosen an area south-west of Goisse on the island of Malden since it's nicely sloped, has a fair bit of tree and bush coverage and is close to the road leading to the town. The trees provide some cover for your advancing troops but not nearly enough, so I decided to put down a load of barrels and wooden fences. A curious side effect here is that the barrels don't really balance well and the slightest hit sends them bouncing into the sea, making



A clever way to scout for good mission locations is to jump in a helicopter on an empty map and go exploring. Use the 'Request Medic' commands to find your grid locations.

the level a cross between *Saving Private Ryan* and *Donkey Kong*. Oh well...

Next come the troops. I figure about four or five infantry units on the west side, scattered along the beach area, and about five or six machine gun nests for the Russians. Give the infantry some waypoints near the road, put in a marker saying if you reach here you win and presto – *Saving Private Ryan* (as if it was filmed using *Dogme* rules). Of course, if I could have made any sense whatsoever of the strings and variables listed in the guide there could probably have been vast armies swarming down the beach, planes and helicopters providing air support, tanks arriving after a set time, fog and mist rolling in across the hills and dramatic music accompanying your every action. But I couldn't. So there isn't. Leave me alone.

EPILOGUE

So the four days are up and as you can see I haven't achieved quite what I envisaged at the start of the whole experiment. But I'm not about to give up, no sir. Too much potential here that's for sure. And Ma Prezzer didn't raise no quitters (well one, but we don't talk about long-lost brother Cedric anymore). I'll be returning to *Operation Flashpoint* at some stage, once I've had a chance to get more familiar with all the strings and variables and whatnots. Besides, I've managed to get my overall campaign idea planned out a bit better now so I feel duty-bound to return to Malden (actually that's not a bad title). Meanwhile, let me hear all about your own stories of despair, misery and, dare I hope, triumph. PCZ

WHAT'S OUT THERE

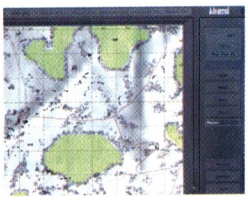
There is, in fact, plenty of help out there for budding *Flashpoint* editors, with the central source of information residing at the Operation Flashpoint Editing Center (www.ofpeditingcenter.com). Tutorials cover just about any problem (including how to create cut-scenes and mission briefings), along with plenty of useful tools, scripting routines and add-ons for those with the inclination to go further. If you're after a bit of shut-eye you can download the weighty Unofficial Operation Flashpoint Command Reference Manual, which contains every command known to Bohemia, and you can also find user-created missions, as well as a thriving forum filled with fellow editors offering help and advice. You'll need to register but it's well worth it.

Alternatively, http://www.flashpoint1985.co.uk/ provides a UK-based perspective with whole sections dedicated to editing and downloading levels. Failing that, you can search your local newsgroup provider (or go to Google) and have a butcher's in alt.games.operation-flashpoint for a more generalised view. There's a lot of help out there if you want it...

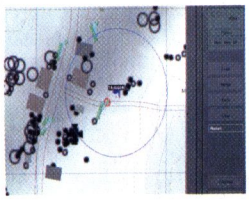
WALKTHROUGH →

A SIMPLE MISSION

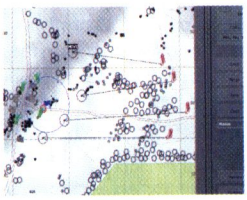
There's not that much to creating a very, very, very (very) basic mission in *Operation Flashpoint*. Really



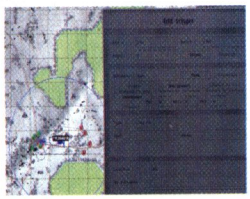
1 Pick a good location. Firefights work best when there's lots of natural cover like trees and bushes, for obvious reasons. Pick somewhere close to a town to add a sense of objective.



2 The simplest method is just to slap down a handful of groups, marking one of the soldiers as the Player. If you want to simulate command, make the player one of the officers.



3 Now place a similar number of enemy groups nearby and give them waypoints heading towards the player's forces. A player-activated trigger can be used to display the briefing text.

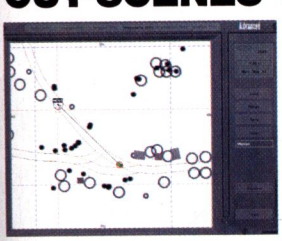


4 Finally a global trigger that covers the whole area is used to detect when there are no more enemy soldiers left. This activates the Game Over screen. Et voilà. Experiment at will.

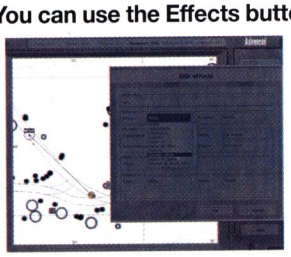
WALKTHROUGH →

CUT-SCENES

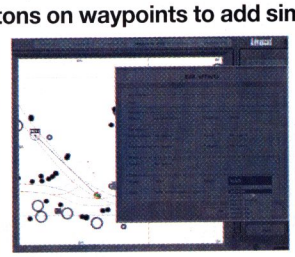
You can use the Effects buttons on waypoints to add simple narrative



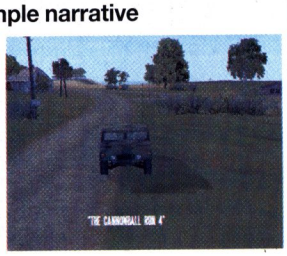
1 For instance, we start the player in a jeep and assign a waypoint just up the road.



2 Under the Effects section of the waypoint menu you'll find the camera controls.



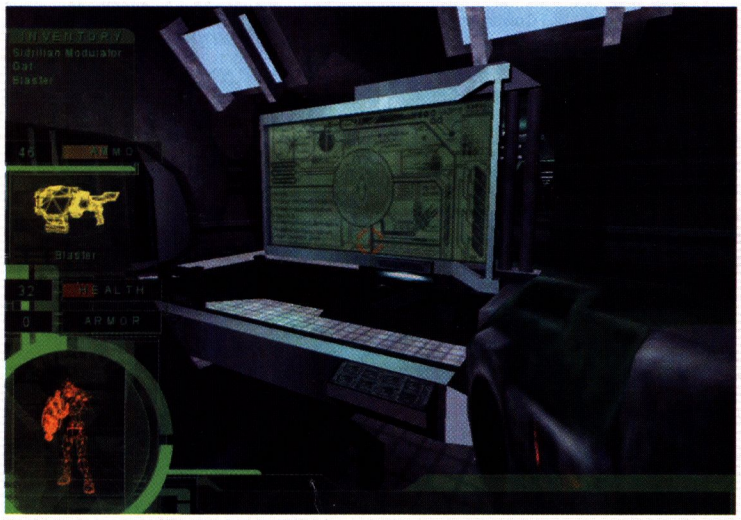
3 You can also add on-screen text, sound effects and even musical scores here.



4 Then once the player hits the waypoint in the game, your directorial flourishes will appear.

THE MODSQUAD

Five mods, no rockers and one *Tony Lamb*. What are you waiting for?



***Sidrial*'s interior detailing is lush – you could almost touch this display screen.**



SIDRIAL

ON THE DVD ■ www.fountainheadent.com/sidrial & www.machinima.com

SIZE 120Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Quake III

FOUNTAINHEAD Entertainment's *Sidrial* is a Total Conversion for *Quake III*. And while it is impressive in itself, it is in fact the latest element in a second project – *Machinima* – that uses game engines in the creation of ultra low-budget (but damned impressive) CGI films. A glimpse at *Sidrial* and its 'fight the aliens to save the Earth' theme will surely whet your appetite. Although the single-player game is something of a letdown – it's great to look at but has no AI – the multiplayer element is a real treat, displaying the same classy looks alongside an enjoyable and well-designed map. Weapons are deliberately limited to promote skill over firepower, health power-ups come from plants that would make Charlie Dimmock proud, and judicious use of the jetpack shows off the *QIII* engine in a whole new light due to the sheer size of the map and its all-round wow factor. Admittedly, *Sidrial* is hampered by the fact that its 120Mb contain only two maps, and single-player is a tad dull, but these are early days and more maps and servers are sure to follow. To find out more, check out the websites and get the full story on *Machinima*, *Sidrial*, as well as information on the *Sidrial* map-making contest. And while you're there, check out the names behind this mod for a surprise...

PCZONE VERDICT 79

A multiplayer treat



Check out that floor... I hope my shoes are clean.

POKE 646

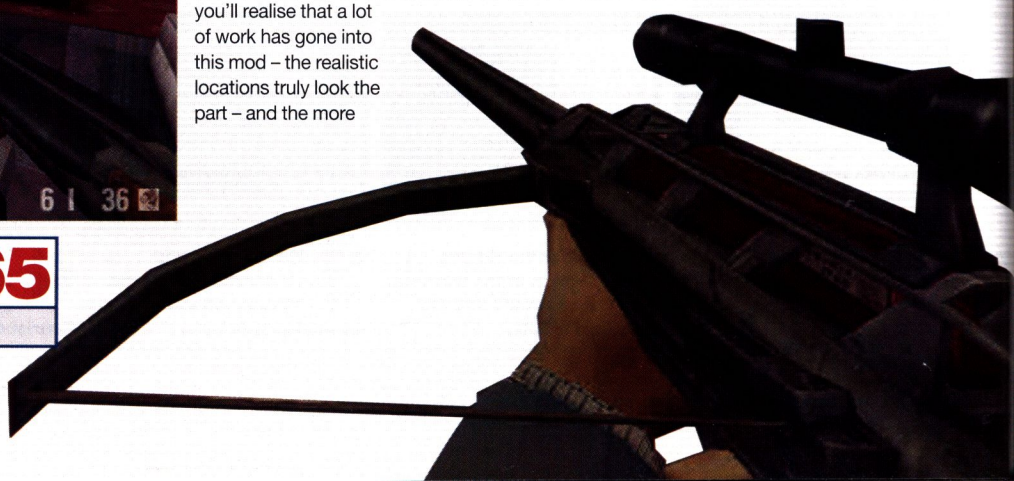
ON THE DVD ■ www.poke646.com

SIZE 63Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Half-Life

WHAT a surprise... those stupid scientists have tried yet again to control the portals to Xen, and sure enough they've arsed it up. Left on your own after the brown stuff hits the fan, your task is to fire up four power generators to close the portals and send the aliens back home. From the start you'll realise that a lot of work has gone into this mod – the realistic locations truly look the part – and the more you play the more you'll enjoy it. At some points, you might be pulling your hair out at the number of puzzles and you'll need some patience not to give up too soon, but do persevere though, because *Poke 646* is really pretty good and well worth sticking at. Great fun.

PCZONE VERDICT 65

Puzzle hobble



VAMPIRE SLAYER CHAPTER III

ON THE DVD ■ www.planethalflife.com/vampire

SIZE 49Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Half-Life



Once a vampire's down you've got to get a wooden stake in quickly or he'll resurrect.

PACK the wooden stakes, grab some garlic and forget your fear of the dark 'cos the best (not to mention only) vampire fighting mod just got even better. Newbies will find every nightmare comes true as bloodsuckers swoop from the night to tickle the jugular, while established fans will love the many new features including a multitude of new maps, enhanced character models, new weapons and even bot support for those moments when a suitably vulnerable online virgin can't be found. The premise is simple – it's a fight to the death with the pasty-faced fangsters up against the forces of good in the personae of Father D and Molly, and for atmosphere and fun this mod is hard to beat... if you find the right server.

PCZONE VERDICT 69

Holy slaughter

NEO CAIRO BETA 5.0

ON THE CD DVD ■ www.planetunreal.com/teamorbit

SIZE 92Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Unreal Tournament

WITH its selection of custom character skins, classy maps, weapon-toting mechs and even a selection of player-pilotable vehicles, few mods are as ambitious as *Neo Cairo*. In fact, Beta 5 proves to be a major improvement over the already top class Beta 4 and in modding terms there's little you won't find here, with a full range of gameplay types including Duel, Deathmatch, Alien Attack and good old Capture The Flag adding to the fun. It's not the easiest mod to set up and get familiar with however, and its impressive list of features makes reading the manual essential (even just to start the game), but perseverance will be amply rewarded by one of the best *Unreal Tournament* mods around. A real winner.

PCZONE VERDICT 78

One of the best for *UT*



Mechs in *Neo Cairo* are works of art, bristling with firepower.

EXPERT HANDGUN MOD



Twin Brownings = killing John Woo-stylee.

ON THE CD DVD ■ www.planetrainbowsix.com/dtd/nav1

SIZE 9Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Rogue Spear: Urban Operations

YET another DTD mod with untold hours of slavish attention to detail. If there's a team around that'll examine a weapon from every conceivable angle then this is it. As usual with this family of mods, there aren't any new maps, and *Expert Handgun* has even eschewed heavier firepower weapons entirely, concentrating solely on shorts – handguns – and nothing else. They're very good too, conveying the power and menace of the original weapons from muzzle to magazine in all their gunmetal glory. If you're after anything more than new handgun models, and the opportunity to fight tangos on the merits of sheer skill alone, you'll be disappointed, but if you like your fighting up close and personal then this is one for you.

PCZONE VERDICT 60

Extreme close-up

SHORTS

PC ZONE TFC – CHEATERS BEWARE



Look Out! Our *TFC* servers are now running The Admin mod which a) allows Wandy to tinker with game settings to his hearts content and b) prevents cheating. About time too. URL's are in the mag, or find us via gamespy – we're regular visitors.

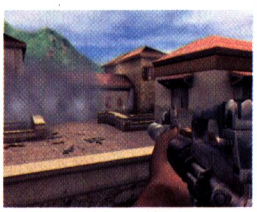
Finished *AvP2* on the hardest setting? Laughed in the face of the Alien queen? If so, then you'll find plenty to keep you busy at avpmissions.com . "Breakdown" is a new Solo, Co-Op, Team DM and Evac mission and you can download it from www.avp2missions.com /missionbreak .

DEFENCE ALLIANCE UT



Defence Alliance is a new mod for *Unreal Tournament* at www.planetunreal.com/da which is showing promise. Currently under internal testing, but possibly available by the time you read this, *DA* is a class based DM-cum-Domination battle with realistic weapons and a simple premise: stop the enemy capturing your base.

QIII URBAN TERROR UPDATED

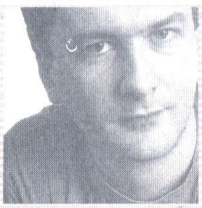


Issue 109 saw us going goggly-eyed over this top class mod for *Quake III* which offered all the fun of *Counter-Strike* without all the attention to realism. It's a whopping 150Mb at version 2.4, but it's the best of its kind for QIII. Find it at www.urbanterror.net.

NEW AIRFIGHT UT SCREENS



It just gets better and better. Check out www.planetunreal.com /airfight to see the latest news and views for yourself, but with proper landscapes and a bigger selection of outstanding aircraft, this is becoming a serious bit of kit. It's top fun too.



MAILBOX

Everybody needs a good rant every now and again, and we're here to listen...

HOLDING COURT Dave Woods

READER REVIEWS

FANCY A CAREER WRITING FOR A GAMES MAG? WELL PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT, SO GET WRITING...

We want reviews of the games you love or the ones you hate. Each one should be between 50 and 350 words and come with a score out of 100. The best one wins a game from the current charts. Send your review to the standard mailbox address (see boxout) and remember to include your name, address and telephone number.

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

PC ZONE ISSUE 110 – 93%

We said..."*AvP2* is the best shooter since *Half-Life*, the best *Aliens* game ever (on any platform) and the best game from Monolith to date."



Wow, Martin Korda has convinced me to give up my scepticism and become a true believer. I read your review of *Aliens Vs Predator 2*, and have to admit I just didn't believe it was going to be as good as you made out. Better than *Half-Life*? Yeah right.

However, after buying *Red Faction* and taking it back to EB in disappointment, I decided to test you out and swapped it for *AvP2*. To say I was bowled over would be an understatement. The marine missions especially are fantastic and the atmosphere is unparalleled. As you start investigating the first base you really feel you're part of a film and that something truly terrible is about to happen. Better than *Half-Life*? To be honest I couldn't care less. I haven't played that game for a couple of years and have forgotten the intricacies. Great game? Without a shadow of a doubt.

The only complaint I have is that the AI is absolutely rubbish in places, but this didn't ruin the game for me, especially as it's disguised by the rush-in-numbers tactics used by the aliens. Top stuff. Now I've just got to save up for *Medal Of Honor*.

Stuart Lewis

VERDICT: 93%

BEST EVER, EVER

Yep, congratulations to the *ZONE* team for issue 112, which is the best *PC ZONE* yet, IMHO. With reviews of *Medal Of Honor, Return To Castle Wolfenstein* (which I've got), *Serious Sam* and even *Harry Potter* (which I might get now, if only for the Quidditch and beating Voldemort), your reviews have been top-notch, as always.

As for covering *Boulder Dash* in Retro Zone – brilliant! That's probably my all-time favourite retro game, which I still play occasionally on the Atari800Win emulator. Well, great issue, and keep up the good work as usual!

Aaron M. Fisher

Aww shucks, you've brought me out in a hot flush.

MEDAL OF DISHONOR

I have been playing PC games since 1990 and have been buying your magazine every month since issue four.

However, I am writing this email because I have become disillusioned with your review system. I have been waiting for the release of *Medal Of Honor* and was delighted to see that your magazine reviewed it and gave it 94 per cent. Luckily the demo was on the cover CD so I could give it a try myself. Having done so, I can say that it's one of the worst games I've ever played. Thankfully I didn't spend any money on it – if the demo hadn't been on last month's magazine I would undoubtedly have purchased the game and I would now be £30 poorer. The fact is games cost a lot of money and I can no longer take a chance on flawed reviews costing me money.

PC ZONE was the only PC magazine worth purchasing but I have decided to revise my opinion. In future I will purchase *PC ZONE* only if it carries a demo of a game that I may potentially purchase with my hard-earned money.

M Catney

Thankfully the old adage 'the customer is always right' can now be forcefully discredited. And how come everyone's money is always 'hard-earned'? There must be some of you reading this from a jacuzzi, surely?

JO PESCI WRITES...

I've had enough of *PC ZONE* – there isn't an issue I haven't read over the last two years and in every one you're all still talking about *Half-Life*. Sure it was good the first few times I played it, but now I can't stand to look at it. I think it's sad that you people can't find better games, *Deus Ex*, for example, is excellent and far more challenging than *Half-Life* and you can do far more stuff in it. *Max Payne* – there's another pile of crap and what a stupid ending, I mean shooting a goddamn tower to knock it over. So my point is there is life after *Half-Life* so shut the f**k up you mother f**king f**kers. F**k you.

J. Cheshire

Wotcha gonna do?

CARD SHARK

Congratulations on a top magazine that I've been reading for more than three years now.

However, I must point out a poor bit of bias on your side against the Radeon 8500 (which my friends and I had been waiting for ever since we read that 'we've not received a test board so they're out the equation' in your review of the latest GeForce 3 cards. In the March issue, which I'm just reading, there are three anti-Radeon letters/articles.

So here comes your dilemma. Just say ATI read your articles and pop a board into your office for review. You've moaned about not having one, slagged off the drivers and printed complaints about their customer service/support – all this before you've actually tested the card. Now what do you do if it turns out to be a flying card? That your test shows the card (as many other mags have done) to be excellent value for money (mine was £214) and an excellent performer. Can you then put the 8500 in your recommended section or do your team's previous untested comments mean you're now duty bound to slate it?

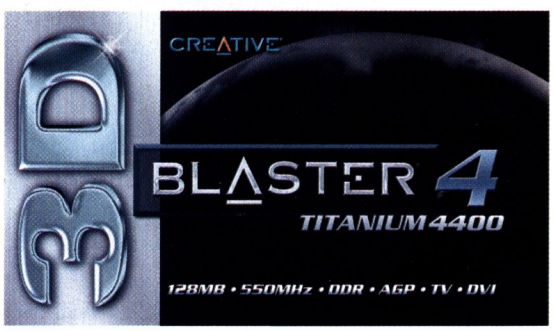
Steve'999'allen

We've been trying to get a Radeon 8500 in to test for

GOT SOMETHING TO GET OFF YOUR CHEST? WRITE TO...

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, 30 CLEVELAND ST, LONDON W1T 4JD, OR E-MAIL: LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

The Letter of the Month wins a spanking new graphics card courtesy of the lovely people at Creative Labs. The Blaster 4 Titanium 4400 is as good as the name suggests, and sporting the new GeForce 4 chipset, it gives you more bang than a rabbit stuffed with semtex.





Polka face.

months now and, while we're well aware that other mags have tested the board, we're also well aware of driver problems as we pointed out in our Watchdog section. We're not going to ignore reader's complaints about a card that's on sale because we haven't been sent one to test. Neither are we going to recommend a card we haven't seen. The good news is that we've finally got a card, although the bad news is that we won't be able to review it until next issue when we'll also be checking out the first GeForce 4 cards.

DIRTY TACTICS?

Activision must be extremely pissed off with Electronic Arts and *Medal Of Honor*. Not only do they pip *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* to your front cover, they also get a better review.

And guess what? *Medal Of Honor* has now been delayed and will not be out until mid-Feb at the earliest, while *RTCW* has been out for over a month.

Also, we got a demo of *Medal Of Honor* in your last issue which was one of the longest and best demos I've seen – was this also part of the plan? Is EA hoping for gamers to hold off buying *RTCW* and wait for *Medal Of Honor*, which at the time was only a couple of weeks away?

Now I can't say whether your comparison between the two games is right or not yet, but when I first started playing *RTCW* I was extremely impressed and reckon it has some of the best graphics I've ever seen in a game. The action is non-stop, and while I normally get bored with a game, I played this all the way through to the admittedly anti-climatic ending.

The question of course is, did EA deliberately release its game to the magazines early to take the shine off the long-awaited release of *RTCW*? And if they did, is it a sign of the competitiveness within an industry that has reached its peak? Is it also evidence that with games getting more expensive to produce there's now a desperate fight for sales?

Stephen Barraclough

Because of a last-minute delay, *Medal Of Honor* wasn't released until February 15, whereas *Wolfenstein* has been on (and flying off) the shelves since Christmas, so it's doubtful whether sales are going to be affected too much. It would've been interesting to see what would have happened if the games had been released simultaneously at Christmas, but hats off to EA for missing out on the lucrative Christmas trade to ensure it's released bug-free.

CHEAT STREET

After sporadically reading your magazine and others over the last couple of years, I finally decided to take the plunge and subscribe, after deciding yours was the best on the market. Excellent content and reviews written in the context I like (ie no bullshit).

But the one thing that annoys me is your fixation with handing out cheat codes. I like to play games as they were designed, not running around in god mode unable to be killed.

So having just received March 2002, issue 113, I was dismayed to find cheats for *MOH: Allied Assault*, before the paint has even dried on the cover. Do you really think that printing these cheats is the only way you can sell your magazine? It's not what I buy it for and I'm sure it's not the reason for the vast bulk of your readers. Scrap the cheats and concentrate more on the hints and tips section.

Phil Mercer

Some people like cheats, some don't. But we agree that there are better things to put in the mag, so from this month on we've stopped printing cheats and are concentrating on helping you get more out of your games. In the coming



Get all your cheats online at www.pczone.co.uk.

READER REVIEWS

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

PC ZONE ISSUE 112 – 88%

We said..."*Return To Castle Wolfenstein* puts on an impressive show of strength through sheer firepower, but *Medal Of Honor* easily manages to outflank it."



First things first, the graphics are superb in this game, there's no getting away from that. The game, however, falls down and cuts its knee in the gameplay department. Firstly, the game just feels like an add-on for *Soldier Of Fortune*, what with the gung-ho music always playing in the background and the seriously crap cut-scenes. My next criticism is how hard the bloody thing is. I always set my FPS games on medium but even that was too hard. Some enemies wipe you out in two shots. These and other niggles dug a little hole for this game in my backyard. Sorry Gray Matter – must try harder!"

Scott Capple

VERDICT: 65%

It is clear that the need to get this game out was greater than maintaining quality gameplay to the end. Having dispatched countless Nazis, you then come balls to face with some legless creatures and finally a knight who is weaker than Gladys Knight without her Pips. Sure the game starts well. The music is great, the cut-scenes well done, AI good and, oh, what an atmosphere. However, I can't help feeling let down by the crap final missions. Buy it, enjoy it for a while, then finish it simply because you have to.

George Linington

VERDICT: 75%

Unbelievable. That is the only word I can think of to describe this incredible shooter. You'll be hooked from the first minute to the very last, as you battle a stream of Nazi soldiers, undead and highly challenging bosses. You won't find a more atmospheric, entertaining and thrilling ride in the genre, and not even the impressive *Medal Of Honor* can stack up to this. With loads of great cut-scenes to keep the well-written storyline tense and interesting, I simply can't fault *RTCW*. The weapons are meaty, and the sound effects are superb. Almost faultless and your review was criminally scathing.

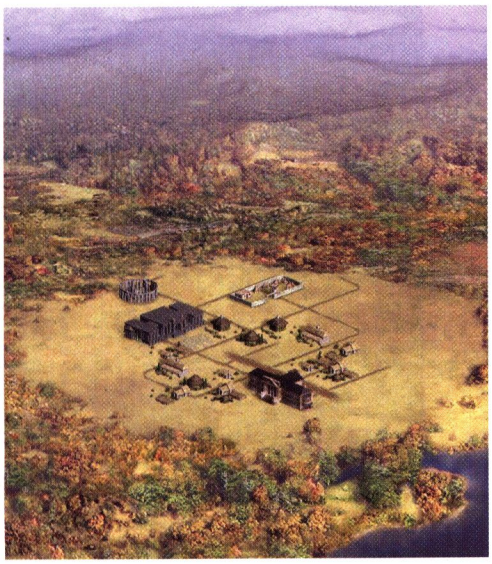
Mark Senior

VERDICT: 95%

READER REVIEWS

CIVILIZATION III
PC ZONE ISSUE 111 – 86%

We said...“This is *Civ*, pure and simple, or as Talking Heads would have put it, ‘same as it ever was’. Seasoned *Civ* veterans wouldn’t have it any other way.”



Same old, same old, same old. Not that we could have expected much else. Sid Meier hit upon a winning formula a few years ago, and if an idea’s selling, why change it? The many little tweaks put in from the last game do of course enhance the experience, especially the more realistic barbarians who don’t just spring up at random, and your nation’s Cultural Influence gives you another option of conquering new lands other than wading in with an army. The one part of the game which did disappoint me however were the graphics. I was expecting a bit more of a revamp, but as with most games of this type, graphics have once again been deemed secondary to gameplay. All in all it’s still a great game, but it surely needs something new for the next instalment to keep fans coming back for more. Maybe real-time combat would be the way forward.

Jane Calderwood
VERDICT: 80%

The master has done it again. Sid Meier, king of all that is strategy and turn-based related has come up trumps again with the third instalment of his epic *Civ* series. Not only is this outing far better looking, but all the nuances help add new challenges for even the most battle-hardened and demanding fan, although admittedly, they’re hardly ground-breaking. The interface is so easy a baby could learn how to use it, but the game remains as deep and addictive as ever. People might complain that there’s no discernible difference between this and other *Civs,* but that’s like saying all dance music sounds the same, or all first-person shooters play identically. If you don’t like it, don’t play it, but I say cancel all your other plans, buy a copy and get ready for the most compulsive gaming action of the last year. *Civ III* is here and it conquers everything else in its path.

Chris Teather
VERDICT: 90%

months we’ll be showcasing hints and tips from expert players and developers, but we’re not turning our backs on the cheaters. Next month you’ll find loads of cheats on our CD and DVD in an special offline version of CheatStation, which you currently find at www.pczone.co.uk.

AI HAS FEELINGS, TOO

First up, great issue last month, but I’d just started playing the *Medal Of Honor* demo when my Gran walked into the room. A few minutes later she had her hands over her eyes with horror at the things that were happening on screen (I had just dispatched an enemy soldier by shooting him first in the arm and then the leg). She didn’t seem to understand that game characters don’t feel pain. I explained to her that they aren’t real (she was still a gibbering wreck), but it got me thinking: at the rate AI is advancing, it will only be a few years before computer characters are as smart as some humans and they may even have a fear of death. At this time will it be considered murder to kill a computer character? If so I’m already guilty of way more than 1,000 counts of murder one, as are many other gamers.

Where do we draw the line on the advancement of AI?

Alex Cason

If you see this man do not approach him, he’s dangerous.

STAR LETTER

GAME SHAME

First of all, I’m 38 years old, not spotty, I don’t own a cardigan or tank top. I also do not wear NHS spectacles with sticking plaster over the bridge of the nose and I don’t live with my mother. I DO play guitar in a band, drink beer, have the occasional smoke (ahem!), hang around with butch men and have intimate knowledge of women. So what I want to know is, why I’m ashamed to admit what I do in my spare time. I would rather confess to actually quite liking Steps, masturbating over pictures of Steve Hill, or, God forbid, thinking Man Utd are a great team who thoroughly deserve to win everything. What is this heinous crime I indulge in I hear you cry? Computer gaming, and although it’s becoming increasingly more widespread among blokes in their 30s/40s, it’s still regarded as a waste of time and something only small children should get involved with.

To me, a good game is akin to a good book. You get the thrills, the involvement and escapism from the everyday shit of the real world. And that is just the single-player aspect. So here’s to a time when old gits like me can hold our balding heads up high, stand up with difficulty and in a feeble voice cry “I play computer games, do you hear me? I PLAY COMPUTER GAMES!”

Bob Davidson

Richie and I are both over the age of 30 and still regularly beat office juniors Rhianna, Martin and Anthony. We’ve even been known to get a couple of frags against them in *Quake III*. I wish you hadn’t said that about Steve though. Without a recycle bin in my head it’s hard to permanently erase certain images.

NEWS OF THE *****

It seems that the *News Of The World* is at it once again. In the January 27 2002 issue they decided to have a go at the upcoming *Half-Life* mod, *Day*



Is *Day Of Defeat* really going to corrupt the nation?

Of Defeat. Am I the only one who is getting disgusted with the media's portrayal of computer gaming? In the article they described the game as sick, on the basis that it features swastikas and other Nazi Party imagery in the content of the game. Also they said that you can decide to play as a Nazi and kill the Allied soldiers.

Now, as an ardent computer gamer – who, may I add, is 22-years-old, has a stable job, and a family – I find the constant hounding of this medium by the media inappropriate, and I find the lack of research into the matter disturbing.

How can they say that the game promotes Naziism? They neglected to mention that you can only play as the Nazi side if you are playing a multiplayer game, against other people, and even so it's hardly graphic. By their own argument we should perhaps ban children playing games of Cowboys and Indians in their back yards. Especially considering the atrocities caused by the American settlers against the Native people of America.

Of course, in no way do I condone the acts of the Second World War, but computer games are just a harmless hobby! I found the tone of that particular article to be very biased – if you are reporting news then you should give your readers the full facts, rather than aiming to shock your audience. I think everyone should send an email to express their outrage to your.letters@news-of-the-world.co.uk

Kris Atkins

The Man Who Knows has more to say on this subject, check him out on page 22.

FOUR MILLION VIRGINS...

Could you please tell Steve Hill that someone who talks, writes about and plays computer games all day long calling *Robot Wars* fans potential serial killers and virgins is just about the worst case of the pot calling the kettle black I think I've ever heard. If you're an anorak, you're an anorak, no matter what the manifestation of your obsession may be. You may think you're cool – everyone else thinks you're nerds and geeks. Just accept it – I have.

C Fry

"Congratulations, you've taken the bait. Treat yourself to a new camshaft mechanism." Steve Hill

GRAND THEFT LATE-O

OK, first of all I'd like to say what a fantastic magazine *PC ZONE* is, keep up the good work.

Now on to my main point. I have a subscription to *PC ZONE* and I'm an avid PC gamer, and I believe the PC is easily the best gaming medium out there. So why oh why is *GTAIII* coming out six months later than the PlayStation 2 version? I've played the game on a friend's PS2 and it's stunning and I'm sick and tired of waiting for it. My PC will support it, I bought a new one just for the game! Since then I've installed *Max Payne, Return To Castle Wolfenstein, Medal Of Honour* and *AvP2*, oh and *Half-Life*. The game does not come out until April on the PC, but it came out in late October for the PS2. Now don't get me wrong, I know that the same thing happens on the PS2 – *Max Payne* only recently came out for it – but the *GTA* series has made its home on the PC, so surely we should get it first. In fact, as we are the best gaming medium we should get every game first! Thanks for letting me get that off my chest.

Tom Playford-Wall

The good news is that, although we're having to wait a bit longer, *Grand Theft Auto III* is going to be infinitely better on PC. I say that because we've got it on good authority that the game is being kitted up with Internet options. Hopefully we'll be able to reveal more on this in next month's issue, so don't miss it!

HOT TOPIC

IN ISSUE 112, RHIANNA PENNED A TYPICALLY HYSTERICAL AND OVER-EMOTIONAL RANT ABOUT THE BATTLE FOR SEXUAL EQUALITY IN THE GAMING ARENA

WHAT WE SAID:

"Now I'm all for girls playing games, I'm even for girls banding together to form clans and websites... (but) I'm still not sure where some people got the idea that prefixing something with the word 'girl' is striking a blow for women everywhere. To put it simply, if you're a girl and want to be accepted in the game-playing arena, then you need to stop focusing on the fact that you're a girl and start focusing on the fact that you're a gamer."

WHAT YOU SAID:

I was just thinking how original it was to find an anti-feminist article in a computer games magazine. Nice position you have Rhianna, I can't stand the idea of 'girl-gamers' either, as it suggests that there are also 'boy-gamers', when in reality we are all just gamers...

JakobG

Yeah well, Rhianna's comment is all well and good, but... I know girls that love to play games and give it a good go, but quite honestly they suck. Maybe it's some female thing, maybe females don't have the hand/eye co-ordination, although I have heard that females have more 3D-oriented brains than males, so in theory they should be better than us.

Biscuit2k

Actually, male and female brains function in different ways and each has different capabilities. Men are generally a lot better in terms of co-ordination and reflexes. This is a result of thousands of years of evolution as the hunters of the species, but we can only concentrate on one thing at a time (so for example we get shot by the two guys on the left of the screen while trying to keep an eye on the guy on the right). Women can concentrate on several tasks at once.

ChosenJuan

It's about time we started to realise that women can and want to play games and the sooner we men start to accept this and welcome women into 'our world' then surely the better it will be for all of us.

Fozzie22

When it comes to girls playing games, I really don't care. Maybe this is because I've been playing console games against my sister for years. It doesn't matter to me in the slightest, and I can't understand people who won't play against someone once they find out they've just been fragged by a woman. I just don't get it. There is no difference once you're playing. For some reason, not as many women play games as men do. People have argued over why that is for ages, but that doesn't mean they don't have the same ability as the guys. You don't have to be stronger, run faster or look bigger to be good at *Counter-Strike*, all you need is two working hands and a brain.

Dandy_Flugle

Errm... no. You would actually need a PC, a monitor, a keyboard and mouse and some electricity, a copy of *CS*, wires and an active Internet connection.

Greaper2

WINNER!

Do mums, i.e. over 50s, come into the female players thing? Cause my mum still hasn't progressed past plugging the NES into the wall. There should be another category, 'Mum gamerz'. They should have 'Mum' servers where they can go into a room together and wave controllers around. If I'm playing a game with my mum, I usually slip the batteries out the TV remote and give her that, which usually keeps her quiet while I play a single-player game. On a more serious note... Good gamer, poor gamer, girl gamer, boy gamer, orange gamer with purple hair, makes no difference as long as you are still all part of the game. Are people going to go easier on you because you're a girl? I doubt it. Don't allow yourselves to be categorised as girl gamers – it will only do more harm than good. Games are for everybody to enjoy... I like to think of games as a parallel world where we can all get on.

LooneyUK

PC ZONE SAYS:

Interestingly, as a sub note, after the Hot Topic had dried up on the forum we got the results of our latest Reader Survey back and although it was no surprise to see that *PC ZONE* still has a predominantly male audience, the female percentage has gone up by 2 per cent from this time last year. The sooner the industry as a whole hits the 50-50 mark the better. After all, where are we supposed to meet our prospective partners if game servers are filled with blokes?



COME AND 'AVE A GO

Every month, there will be a new Hot Topic on the *PC ZONE* Website. Check out www.pczone.co.uk, join in the arguments, entertain us or say something vaguely intelligent and get yourself in the magazine. If we think you've made the best contribution we'll give you a game from the current top ten. Next month: Piracy.



WATCHDOG

Raging temper? Stress headache? Chronic insomnia? All caused by the PC industry? Flush those cure-all tablets down the toilet and drop Watchdog a line instead...

PLAYING IT STRAIGHT Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry – we're here to help when you've reached the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1T 4JD

EMAIL Alternatively, email us at **letters@pczone.co.uk** with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

THE ACCUSED

freeserve

ntl:

Kodak

TIME

BT

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

UNCANDID CAMERA

Q On January 6 2002, I spotted the Kodak DX3700 Digital camera for £100 on Kodak's site. I ordered it and received a confirmation email which stated: 'Please keep this message as your receipt'. The message ended: 'You should also be aware that you have a right to cancel this contract if you wish.'

On January 8, I received an email from Kodak stating: 'We regret to inform you that, unfortunately, the price as stated on the shop@kodak website on December 31 2001 was incorrect.' Great. But they have already sold me the camera. We have a 'contract'. For me, it is a huge disappointment and the ten per cent offered as a goodwill gesture is more like a slap in the face than anything else.
Wybren den Breejen

A It's the old problem of website bods not checking their figures properly and customers ending up feeling cheated because of it. So what do Kodak have to say for themselves?

"On December 31 2001, Kodak advertised a DX3700 digital camera together with a 32Mb memory card plus inkjet paper on its website," says a company spokesperson. "The price for this collection of products was shown as £100 which was incorrect. The correct price of £329 has now been posted on the website. Kodak regrets any inconvenience and disappointment caused to customers."

They are offering any affected customers a discount on their next order from the website. They point out that "Kodak does reserve the right to decline or to accept any customer's offer to purchase, prior to payment."

We'd still like to know though why it seemingly took Kodak so long to spot their mistake – over a week in fact. Not very sharp, eh?

TIME AFTER TIME

Q I'm writing to complain about the poor service that I have received from Time Computers. Back on June 25 2000, I purchased a laptop from them for £699, complete with a four-year extended warranty. The total cost was £339.

On receiving the laptop, everything worked fine for the first six months but then I had a problem with the battery and the hard drive. The laptop was picked up at the end of November 2000 and sent back to me on December 7. The laptop had a brand new hard drive fitted and this worked fine. However, there was still a problem with the battery.

After having the battery on charge for two hours, the system said that the battery was full so I powered down the system and switched to the battery. Two minutes after switching the laptop on with the battery, it began its critical battery bleep. And then shut down.

I reported this to Time in February 2001, and they said the power adapter was faulty. They did send me a new one but it was also wrong.

Since February 2001, I have sent Time countless emails about the problem, which they have ignored. I even went as far as sending the same email 100 times in one day, to which I never received a response of any kind. After various calls to Time with no success, I got to speak to them on December 11 2001. They told me that because the battery can be removed, they are not under obligation to fix it and the unit's 12-month warranty had run out (even though I have an extended warranty). I am told the battery is a consumable item so they can't help.

I then asked them about getting the unit exchanged and I was told that there was no chance of that happening. I was told I would be called back. At the time of writing this letter it's December 21 2001, and there has been no phone call.
Robert Sked

A Well, look at what an extended warranty gets you with Time. A world of hurt by the sounds of it. A Time spokesman told us that apparently on the day you wrote to us, a new battery was sent out. A wonderful coincidence that, eh? Meanwhile, Time had this to say: "Robert, please accept our apologies. This incident has taken far too long to resolve and we have to put our hands up and say that it was human error on our behalf. Initially we got the problem wrong (hence sending the adapter) and it went from bad to worse. There is no excuse for this and we completely understand your frustration."

"I even sent them the same email 100 times in one day, but they didn't respond"

ROBERT SKED ON THE SLOWNESS OF TIME

"FECKIN' FREESERVE!"

Q I have been a member of Freeserve almost since the beginning, but they have changed their package. They sent everyone an email saying words to the effect of 'price goes up from £9.99 to £10.99 at end of November. Take advantage of this deal where you can go on the Internet at any time and pay only £12.99 (£6.49 for first six months). Do nothing and be disconnected.'

I decided to take advantage of the Freeserve HomeTime package offer. The first complaint I have is that upon sign-up, I found that the £6.49 deal wasn't actually true. They were only offering the first month free.

The second problem was that upon sign-up and cancellation of the old service, I dialled up to the new service and it was engaged every time I tried to get through. So I looked on the Freeserve website for any information and all the email addresses and support numbers were out of date. I also got no answer on the Freeserve technical support number. I'm paying for this service and I can't use it.
James

A Freeserve tells us that it would appear that the reason you experienced this problem was because your wife was registered to the Off Peak service at a cost of £5.99. "This service has now been discontinued," explains Freeserve, "and replaced in full by the HomeTime package. HomeTime costs £10.99 per month. As a special offer, this has been offered to old Off Peak customers at a cost of £6.49 for a period of six months. The BT Surftime package can be cancelled on registering to this package."

Apparently, you did receive a special offer passcode: "Having registered in error by not entering this code, the customer only signed up to the one month free offer. As a gesture of goodwill we have credited James' wife's credit card with £25.98."

As for the busy line problems you experienced, Freeserve tellingly didn't offer any comment...

NTL HELL

Q I am writing in about the worsening service that NTL is providing. In the last few months my connection has gone down several times, and the performance has been extremely patchy when it's actually been working. Worse though is the awful customer service. I have given up trying to contact them after constant waits on the phone. Things came to a head when I suffered a total loss of service. Having listened to the list of outages on the recorded



SAINTS NOT SINNERS

EVEN A BLIND SQUIRREL FINDS AN ACORN ONCE IN A WHILE...

I recently bought *Civ 3*, but the game wouldn't work on my PC. I sent an email to Infogrames and fully expected to get the usual automated email, which stated that they would get back to me when...

1. They were less hungover
2. They could be bothered
3. There was a full solar eclipse

But no. Much to my shock and horror they replied within 24 hours and the advice worked. Just thought your readers would want to know that there are still people out there who know their job and actually give a damn.

Alan Massow

message, there was no mention of any in my area so I dialled the main number.

After 45 minutes, I was finally connected to an operator who immediately informed me that there *was* a service outage. I suggested they update their status broadcast message to avoid such delays. The operator replied: "Well, you can always check our website which gives you up-to-date info on the network status." Err, how? NTL is continuing to lay off staff, which suggests things will only get worse.

Russ Welsh

A NTL told us they are very sorry to hear about your dissatisfaction with their cable modem service and have already arranged an appointment to tackle your service issues.

On your job cut worries, NTL offered the following: "We have specifically said that no customer-serving roles will be affected. In fact, we are recruiting in this area, as maintaining the improvement in customer service is one of our most important priorities."

As for your experiences with their customer services, they say: "Unfortunately, there are days when call volumes into our customer call centres are particularly high. On the other hand, some days every call to NTL gets answered within 20 seconds. However, we are aware of these high call volumes and are therefore implementing new procedures to ensure that customers' calls are answered more quickly."

Watchdog will keep an ear out over the next few months to make sure that there is a significant improvement.

BT BARNEY

Q I moved to Aberdeenshire in June and couldn't wait to get back online as I run a website. I previously used NTLworld and got average speeds of 5K/s. I wanted broadband and decided to go for ADSL, which was advertised as being 10 times faster than a standard 56K modem.

I connected to the new line and found that I'd effectively got a trickle that amounted to no more than 0.5K/s! I phoned BT and they increased the gain but it didn't help. So I then asked for an engineer to check the line. He duly arrived but informed me that there was absolutely nothing wrong with it.

Philip Drysdale

A We sent off your complaint to BT who got back to us with the following: "We're sorry to hear that Mr Drysdale is continuing to have problems. The pair of copper wires which form his telephone line were changed by our engineers on December 1, and we haven't received any fault reports since then."

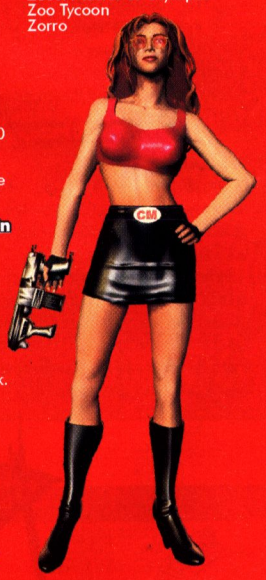
In the meantime, BT says they don't officially guarantee any speed for data on a PSTN line. However, they point out, the minimum European standard of 2.4Kbps for fax transmission is the accepted standard within the communication industry.

They also told us: "The speed of transmission depends on a number of variables not least of which is the distance from the exchange and the server being accessed. However, modem operations can be disturbed by impulse noise from a number of sources – for instance, powerful electrical machinery close to the local telephone line. Not all modem designs are equally resistant to these effects."

By now, it sounds like your speed troubles should have been resolved. Let us know if this is not the case. PCZ

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Airport Inc
Aliens vs Predator 2
Alone in the Dark 4
America
Anno 1602
Aquanox
Army Men 1 & 2
Army Men: Toys in Space
B = 02
Battle Realms
Black & White
Black & White: Creature Isle
Brian Lara Cricket
Broken Sword 1 & 2
C = 03
C & C: Firestorm
C & C: Red Alert
C & C: Re
C & C: R
C & C: Tib
Call to Po
Carmage
Carmage
Champ. M
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Champior
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Champior
Civilizatio
Civilizatio
Codenam
Codenam
Colin McR
Comman
Comman
Commandos B. Call of Duty
Commandos B. E. Lines
Constructor
Cossaks: European Wars
Cutthroats
D = 04
Death Trap Dungeon
Delta Force 1, 2 & Land W.
Desperados
Deus-Ex
Diablo 1 & 2
Dino Crisis
Disc World 2 & Noir
Dope Wars
Dracula Last Sanctuary
Driver
Druuna
Dune 2000
Dungeon Keeper
Dusk 'Til Dawn
E = 05
Empire Earth
Enemy Infestation
Escape from Monkey Island
Etherlords
Europa Universalis
Everquest
Evil Twin
F = 06
F-22 Raptor
FA P. Lgue F'ball Man. 2000
FA P. Lgue F'ball Man. 2002
Fallout Tactics
Fate of the Dragon
FIFA 2002
Final Fantasy 8
Flight Unlimited 2
Frank Herbert's Dune
From Dust 'Til Dawn
G = 07
Gangsters 1 & 2
Ghost Recon
Golf Resort Tycoon
Grand Theft Auto 1, 2 & 3
Grim Fandango
Ground Control
GTA: London 1969
H = 08
Half Life
Half Life: Blue Shift
Half Life: Opposing Force
Harry Potter
Heroes of M&M III
Hidden & Dangerous
Hitman 1 & 2
I = 09
I. Jones: Inf. Machine
Imperium Galactica
Incoming
Industrial Spy
J = 10
Jedi Knight: Myst. of Sith
L = 12
Links 2001
London Racer
Oni
Operation Flash Point
Outcast
P = 16
Pharoah
Pizza Connection 2
Planet of the Apes
Player Manager 99
Populous the Beginning
Premier Manager 98
Prisoner of War
Project IGI
Q = 17
Quake 1, 2 & 3
R = 18
Rainbow 6: Black Thorn
Rally Championship 2000
Rally Trophy
Red Alert 2
Red Alert 2 Yuri's Revenge
Red Faction
Redguard
Return to C. Wolfenstein
Robot Arena
Robot Wars
Rogue Spear
Roller Coaster Tycoon
Rune
Runescape
S = 19
Secret Service
Serious Sam 1 & 2
Severance: Blade of Dark.
Shogun: Total War
Silent Hunter 2
Sim City 2000 & 3000
Simpsons
Sims
Sims: Livin' It Up
SiN
Ski Resort Tycoon
Soldier of Fortune
Soul Reaver 1 & 2
Spiderman
Star Trek: Armada 1 & 2
Star Trek: Elite Forces
Star Wars: Battle Naboo
Star Wars: Galactic Battleg.
Star Wars: Phantom Menace
Star Wars: Racer
Startopia
Starwars: Starfighter
Sting!
Stronghold
Sudden Strike
Swat 3
T = 20
Technomage
The Curse of Monkey Island
The Mummy
The Sting
Theme Hospital
Theme Park
Theme Park Inc
Theme Park World
Thief: Dark Project
Tiberian Sun
TOCA Touring Cars 2
Tom Clancy's Black Thorn
Tomb Raider 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2
Traffic Giant
Traitor's Gate
Transport Tycoon
U = 21
Unreal Tournament
V = 22
Vietnam: Black Ops
W = 23
War Games: Defcon 1
Warcraft 2
Wizardry 8
Worms 2
Worms Armageddon
X = 24
X Com Intercepter
X Games Pro Boarder
X Wing Alliance
Z = 26
Z: Steel Soldiers
Zeus: Master of Olympus
Zoo Tycoon
Zorro



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TO MOVE BACK ONE MENU SELECTION

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PlayStation2 | SEGA SATURN | GAME BOY COLOR | GAME BOY ADVANCE

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Customer Service: 08700 885 656 (BT National Rate applies)

DISC PAGES



■ **DISCS AND WORDS** Matt Cheshire

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on **08701 711 481**. The line is open weekdays between 9.30am and 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, **or email pc_zone@interchange.co.uk**

BEFORE YOU DIAL... If you are calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant information – ie system type, soundcard, RAM and so on – plus the nature of the fault.
- Have a pen and paper to hand, so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

- You need at least a P266 with 32Mb RAM to run the software on the discs. Please note that some games also require a 3D accelerator card.
- Use the browser and menu system to see which demos are 3D accelerator only.

DVD CONTENT

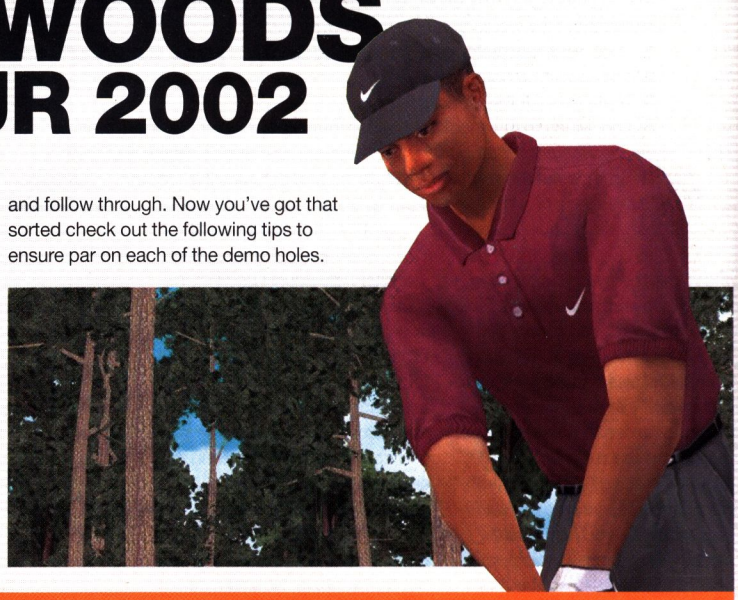
- The DVD deadline for this issue was earlier than the CDs and for this reason some of the demos didn't make it onto the disc. We apologise for this and we'll ensure that any content that was missed will be on next month's DVD.

DISCLAIMER

- This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it is always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
- Dennis Publishing Limited cannot accept any responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

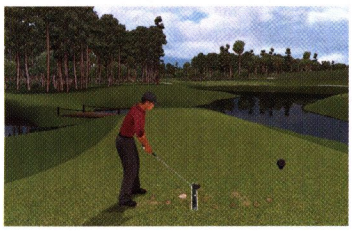
TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2002

CD1 Pub: Electronic Arts



Tiger Woods is golf, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2002* from EA Sports is a golf game, and this is a demo that provides you with three holes of the TPC at Sawgrass: so far, so simple. If you're an old-skool PC golfer though you might find the new swing system a bit tricky to sort. As any golfer will tell you, the secret to a good game of golf is in the swing, and it's not only about power, but rhythm and fluidity as well. To action a good Tiger swing you have to point on Tiger's club, click to action the swing process, pull your mouse back to execute your back-swing and then push it forward to strike the ball and follow through. Now you've got that sorted check out the following tips to ensure par on each of the demo holes.

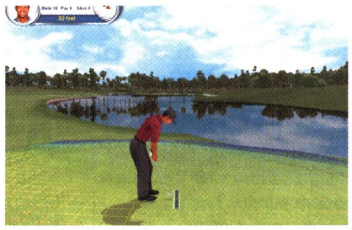
WALKTHROUGH →



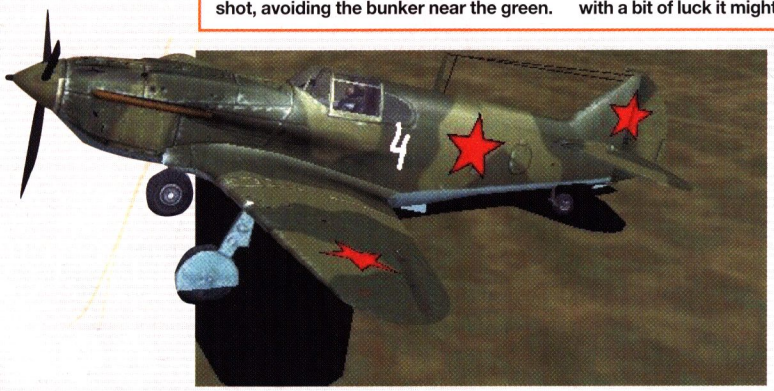
1 If you get on the green in two on the first hole, you're on a winner. From the tee, aim to the right of the trees to avoid a nasty golf/foliage incident, then aim slightly right again on your second shot, avoiding the bunker near the green.



2 The second hole is a par 3. Aim manually to line the direction arrow up with the flag before striking the ball at full power with the 8-iron. This should get you close to the hole and with a bit of luck it might even drop.



3 The last hole is a tricky par 4 with more water. Aim well right of the pond to ensure you land on the fairway with your first shot, then hit a high-arced shot onto the green to putt for a birdie. Simple. You *are* Tiger Woods.



MECHWARRIOR: BLACK KNIGHT

CD2/DVD Pub: Microsoft

Despite the fact that no-one in this country buys them, Microsoft keep pumping out boxes filled with big robots. *Black Knight* is the latest add-on pack and the demo offers three modes of play: Absolute Attrition, Team Absolute Attrition, and Siege Assault. There are two very different maps available to play, one set in a volcanic base and the other a spaceport, and both offer wide-open spaces, obstacles, and enclosed areas. Server support seems limited, but you can add bots so that you can play with yourself.



His bark's worse than his bite.

IL-2 STURMOVIK

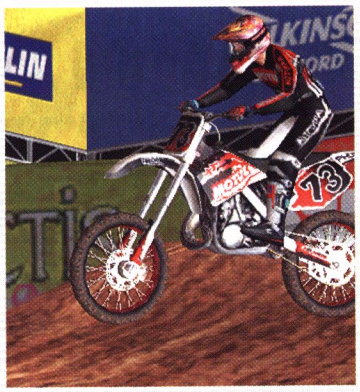
CD1 Pub: Ubi Soft **Reviewed:** Issue110 (90%)

IL-2 has flown straight into the top spot in the flight sim genre and after getting a straight 90 per cent in our review, it's officially the best flight sim in the world. This new demo should prove the point to any straggling dissenters.

Additions include three new flyable planes (bringing the total up to six), including four Russian and two German, more AI planes and scores of ground units. What's more, as well as the new single-player mission and the quick mission builder option, you can go online via the ubi.com game service and play against human opponents.

A maximum of four players are allowed on one server at a time and servers for the demo are limited, but it should be enough to whet your appetite and convince you that the full game is worth shelling out for.





MOTO RACER 3

CD1 Pub: EA **Reviewed:** Issue 111 (74%)

It's not easy to replicate the rough-and-tumble, tight leather, scraped elbows world of motorbiking, and the *Moto Racer* series has always sensibly eschewed the hardcore simulation market and opted for an arcadey model that you can pick up and run with (so to speak) in minutes. (*Get on with it – Ed!*)

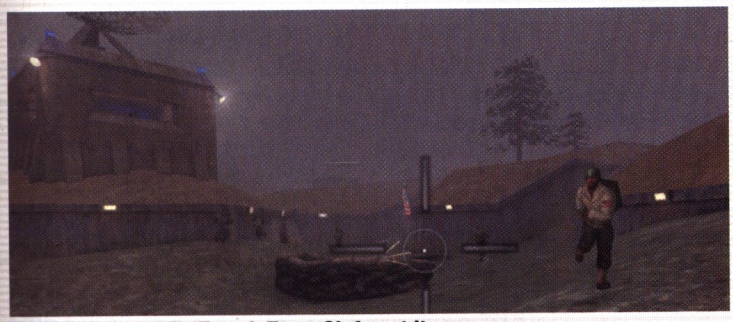
The code on your disc gives you the chance to spank a 250cc Grand Prix bike around a tarmac track at the Sachsenring. Alternatively, you can go for a play in the mud in a 125cc Supercross race in Barcelona. Both events are hugely different experiences though…

In the Supercross you want to take each corner as tight as possible and pump the throttle as you turn for better grip. Prime yourself for each jump and press up or down to move the front wheel of your bike correspondingly – you'll get a much better landing if you plant your back wheel slightly before the front.

The track race is a little easier – don't be afraid to use the brakes when approaching corners and be aware that this style of racing will feel significantly different to Supercross. Avoid accidents at the start as falling off your bike costs valuable time.

TRENCH TOAST

CD1 Official map for *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*



Trench Toast, geddit, Trench Toa... Oh forget it.

Trench Toast is a huge multiplayer map ideal for lots of players, with a large, open area in the middle surrounded by grassy banks and two main buildings at either end where each team spawns. Being a checkpoint map, the aim is to capture all six flags before the enemy does. It's not easy, as the distance between each capture point is vast. The best thing to do is to locate each flag and have enough players on your team to guard a flag when you've captured it, otherwise you'll have to do it all over again.

There's one flag at either end of the map, two in the middle clearing near the crew guns, and one either side on the grassy areas, also towards the middle of the level.

Installation is easy, as it's an executable file and finds your default *RTCW* directory and there are a number of servers online with this map in the cycle list. If you want to create a server and play on Trench Toast, don't forget to set the game type to CP, otherwise you won't see your new map in the list.

SKY SPORTS FOOTBALL QUIZ

CD2/DVD Pub: THQ **Reviewed:** Issue 112 (62%)

Continuing the football flavour this month, the extremely talented Miss Kirsty Gallagher is here to test your football mettle. You'll need your wits about you to brave the soccer teasers, as some of these puppies were designed to test the finest footballing minds. Not for the faint-hearted.

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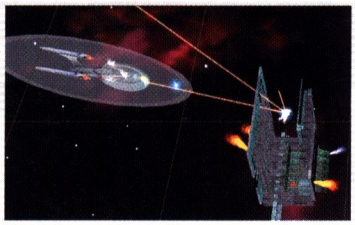
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STAR TREK: ARMADA II

CD2/DVD Pub: Activision **Reviewed:** Issue 113 (52%)



Resistance is what?

Given the fact that there's so much pap around when it comes to the *Star Trek* licence, it's nice to see something that isn't actually so bad. We might not have given it the biggest review score ever, but there are a fair few fans out there.

This demo offers you the chance to play single-player, Instant Action or even multiplayer, via GameSpy. You can only choose to command the federation or The Borg, but the challenge of building the best your fleet has to offer should keep you going for a while. There are few servers up as we write, but we're pretty sure that by the time you've bought this magazine, there'll be a good deal more.

SKY SPORTS FOOTBALL MANAGER

CD1/DVD Pub: THQ **Reviewed:** Issue 112 (78%)

Who'd be a football manager? Salaries that barely scrape seven figures, unwarranted attention from young blondes and a working week that doesn't allow you the weekend off. Still, someone's got to do it and if your career prospects are worse than Peter Mandelson's you can learn your craft here with a free 30-day trial.

Head to www.nisports.com, click on Vouchers in the menu bar at the top of the screen, then when you see the prompt, enter the following voucher number: PCZqflopkY0TsaoEgylLH9sbc.

You should be aware that this number is case-sensitive, so take care when using it or you may find yourself taking an early bath.

DISCIPLES II: DARK PROPHECY

CD1/DVD Pub: Strategy First **Reviewed:** Issue 114 (75%)



Two men, one ring, you just know it's going to end in tears.

Although this title might not stand up against the graphical might of *Etherlords* it's nevertheless an addictive turn-based strategy title, perfect for those that want a change of scenery from *Heroes Of Might & Magic*. This demo offers one single-player quest only and that's the mission to raid the Empire Libraries to find a document containing the whereabouts of the Timmoria Mines. The game starts with basic units, but if you add research structures in your city, you can upgrade your characters as they gain experience. There are five different types of evil leader to choose from with their own special abilities in combat, scouting, or claiming resource areas.

MYTH III: THE WOLF AGE

CD2/DVD Pub: Take 2 Interactive **Reviewed:** Issue 111 (70%)

If you're a sucker for pretty graphics and engrossing gameplay, look no further than *Myth III*. Offering a tutorial, and one single-player mission, it's easy to pick up with a simple control system that's covered in the tutorial. You also get the option to play the demo online or over a LAN, and there are a few servers online, although you have to connect via GameSpy. Building up a decent force and destroying the enemy is a visual treat, so have a look for yourself and prepare to be impressed.

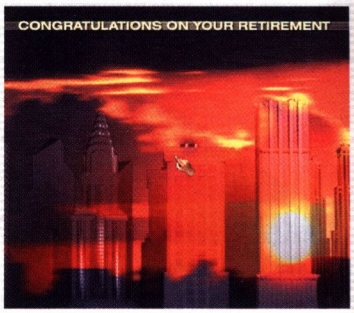


Stop sniggering at the back.

CAPITALISM II

CD2/DVD Pub: Ubi Soft **Reviewed:** Issue 114 (55%)

Another game promising endless wealth and power? Yes, and it's from Ubi Soft who should know all about that. Build a business from the ground up or run a multi-million pound corporation in this single-player only demo. You too could be the proud MD of your very own retail company if you check out the Entrepreneur campaign, which offers a tutorial mode and the chance to start your empire, then join the big boys in the world of the Capitalist campaign and dominate entire world markets.

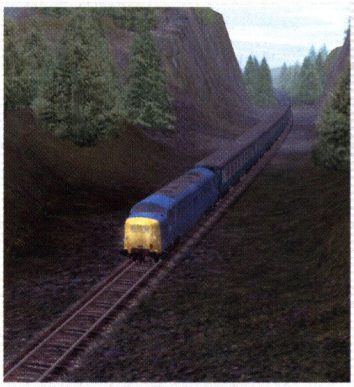


Hmm, one day. Maybe.

TRAINZ

CD2/DVD Pub: Strategy First

You might find it hard to believe, but train sets have found it hard to compete with the assorted tweenies/beenies/freenies that have caused fights in toy shops across the country. However, after *Microsoft's Train Simulator* made the anorak semi-fashionable again, other developers are jumping on the engine. In *Trainz* you get two modes, one where you get to drive the things and a surveyor mode, where you get to build a virtual railway and watch your trains in action. There's a total of four separate locomotives to choo choo-se from and they've all got different numbers.



The next station is Birmingham New Street. The doors stay locked.

PATCHES

AvP2 Multiplayer Map Update
AvP2 Single-Player Map Update
AvP2 v1.0.9.3
Battle Realms Battle Pack #1
Battlecruiser Millennium v1.0.05
IL-2: Sturmovik v1.03a
Max Payne v1.05
Midtown Madness 2 v1.1
Monopoly Tycoon v1.2
Moto Racer 3 v1.1
Operation Flashpoint Upgrade 4
Quake III Arena Point Release 1.31
Return To Castle Wolfenstein v1.1
Star Trek Armada II v1.1
Summoner v1.4
Throne Of Darkness v1.2.18

MOD REVIEWS

Neo Cairo Beta 5.0 For Unreal Tournament
D-Day: Normandy Beta 3.2 For Quake II
D-Day: Normandy Patch v3.2

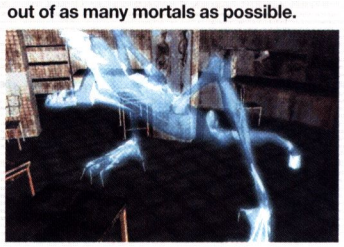
HOTSHOTS CD1

GHOST MASTER

This movie shows off in-game footage and character animation from this Sim/poltergeist-style spook 'em up.

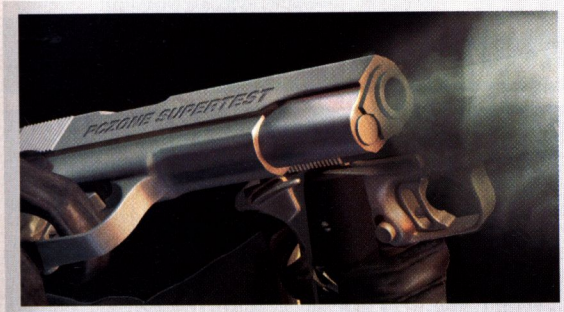
You are the Ghost Master, in charge of a team of spooks, spectres and all manner of bump-in-the-night critters, and your mission is to scare the crap out of as many mortals as possible.





DVD EXCLUSIVES

ALL THE CONTENT ON THIS PAGE IS ONLY AVAILABLE ON THE DVD EDITION OF PC ZONE. TO SUBSCRIBE AND GET A PACKED DVD EVERY MONTH, TURN TO PAGE 122.



SUPERTEST

The *PC ZONE* Superest is back, dragging the level of debate in the office back to the gutter as we decide the fate of great gaming legends. The way we see it everything deserves a second chance, to be judged in relation to its peers, and we're willing to put our reputation on the line by giving you demos for all the games we're talking about. Try 'em out, read our verdict (starting on page 98) and see if you agree with us. If not, drop us a line and let us know what you think. Don't pull any punches – we're big boys, we can take it.

THE CONTENDERS
Medal Of Honor
Ghost Recon
Max Payne
Return To Castle Wolfenstein
Aliens Vs Predator 2

EXTENDED PLAY AND HOTSHOTS

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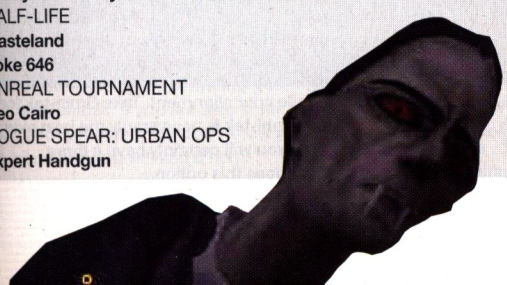


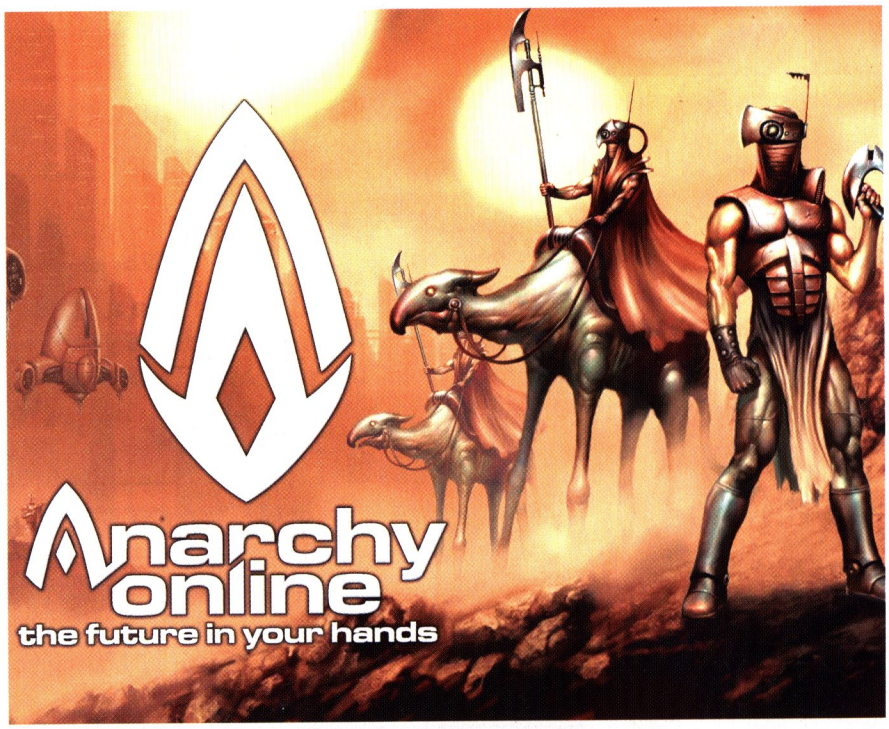
PLAYABLE DEMO

COMANCHE 4 MULTIPLAYER
Check out the multiplayer deathmatch level, Cityscape, where you can play with up to 15 others on NovaWorld.

THE MODSQUAD

The best new releases every month. See page 128 for full reviews.
QUAKE III
Full Metal Jacket
Weapons Factory Arena
Sidrial
Tribal CTF
QUAKE II
D-Day Normandy
HALF-LIFE
Wasteland
Poke 646
UNREAL TOURNAMENT
Neo Cairo
ROGUE SPEAR: URBAN OPS
Expert Handgun





ANARCHY ONLINE FULL SOFTWARE

DVD Pub: Funcom

REQUIRES PII 300 , 128Mb RAM, 3D card
DESIRES PII 450, 256Mb RAM, 3D card

To celebrate the launch of our DVD issue, we've managed to secure a massive UK exclusive – the full client software for *Anarchy Online*, one of the biggest online RPGs in the world. Install the software as normal, then launch your web browser and head to: www.anarchyonline.com/free/pc zone to register your free 14-day trial period. You'll need to enter your credit card details, but you won't be charged a penny until your 14 days are up.

If you decide you want to carry on playing you won't need to do anything and your credit card will be debited automatically, although you can select between the following three subscription options: one month for US$12.95, three months for US$33.95 or six months for US$59.95.

When you're ready to kick into the game proper, turn the page and check out our Player's Guide, which will ensure that even if you haven't stepped foot online before your first few moments in *Anarchy Online* will be as sweet and blissful as your first encounter with *PC ZONE*.

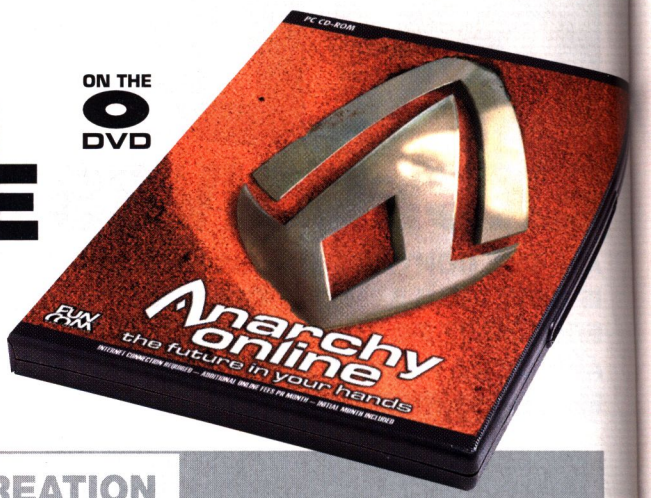
IMPORTANT

If for any reason you decide that you don't want to subscribe, you must go to http://register.funcom.com and enter your user details in order to cancel your account. All of your details including your credit card details and any characters created will be permanently deleted. If you don't do this before your 14-day trial period runs out you will be charged for a month's play and no refunds will be given.



PLAYER'S GUIDE: ANARCHY ONLINE

ON THE DVD



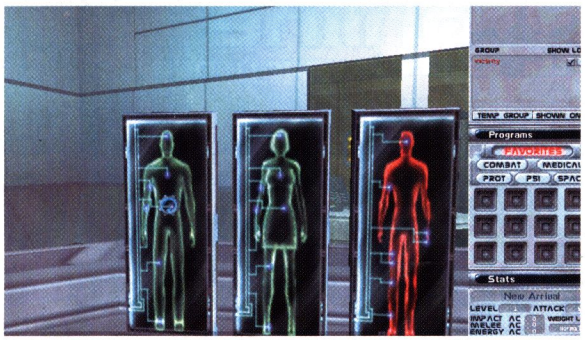
Funcom's award-winning futuristic online RPG can be a little daunting for first-time players. *Chris Anderson* guides you through your first tentative steps on the planet of Rubi-Ka

WELCOME to our *AO* guide, for the purposes of which we're going to assume that you are a total 'newbie' (in other words, you've never played an online RPG before). If you're *EverQuest* adept then you'll be able to get to grips with *AO* without us holding your hand. First you need to identify the serial number on the back of your DVD case (you'll need this to get into the game), and follow the steps on the disc pages (see p139) to install the *Anarchy Online* software to your hard drive. Finally, launch the game and you will be greeted with the log in screen. Enter the name and password you chose during installation, and you will be taken to the character select screen (you will almost definitely have to wait while the game downloads any patches you need to your hard drive, so please be patient). You are now ready to make your first character and explore the world of *Anarchy Online*.

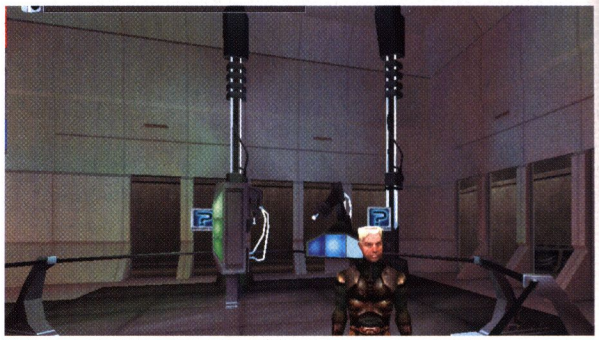
THE MAN WITH NO NAME

To start with, you have no characters to play with. So let's make one. See where it says Character Name? Make sure it says 'Create new character' under this section, and click 'play' to begin. You are now in the character creation room. The game puts you into third-person mode by default. If you're used to playing first-person games, press 'F8' now to go to first-person mode. Hold down the right mouse button and move your mouse around to take in your environment, and press the up and down arrow keys to move backwards and forwards. Once you've got the feel of the movement controls, take a look at the silhouettes in the room. Hold down the left-shift key and click on each of them to find out what they are. We are now going to make an Omni-tek Adventurer for you to get started with. Follow these steps.

THE ART OF CHARACTER CREATION



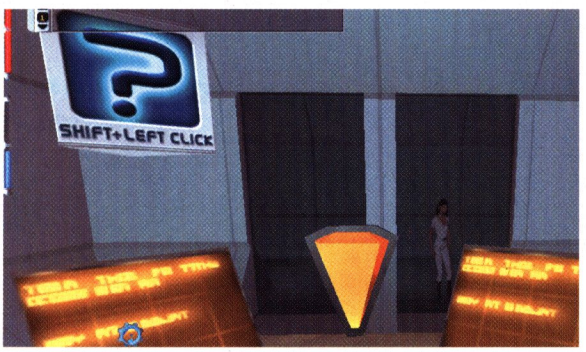
1 Locate and left-click the Solitus male (or female – whatever floats your boat) silhouette. Shift and left-click on anything in the room to identify it. This method can be used to identify most objects in the game. Double-click the yellow arrow and go to the next room.



2 Choose a face you can live with (anything's probably an improvement). Press F8 again so you can see them properly, and a body shape that's more complimentary than the one you are currently slouching about in. Double-click the yellow arrow to go to the next room.



3 Now you need to choose a profession. Don't sweat about it too much for now – go for a decent all-round character like the Adventurer. You can always come back and start again with more specific skills once you get used to the basics. Look at the profession options and choose Adventurer. Proceed to the next room by once again double-clicking the yellow down arrow.



4 Choose a name. Remember that this is a MMORPG, so you get extra points for using as few vowels as possible, and over-enthusiastic use of apostrophes will make you an extremely popular member of the *AO* world.



5 This is where you choose your alignment. Take Omni-tek for now. We're not saying Omni-tek is necessarily the best side to start the game with, but you will certainly have a more interesting starting city if you choose this option.

MISSIONS MEAN MONEY



While exploring your surroundings and teaming with other people will no doubt capture your interest in early levels, do *not* ignore the mission terminal. Missions are the only viable way to make any sort of decent money in the whole game, unless you train up a trade skill to a very high level. Make sure you check the mission rewards so you know you will get an item you can actually use if you complete the mission successfully.

GETTING AROUND



Use these portals to get quickly from one zone to the next. The world of *AO* is so vast that if you want to complete missions using these portals is the only way, unless you want to spend hours running round the place trying to find zone exits and entrances.

ENTERING COMBAT

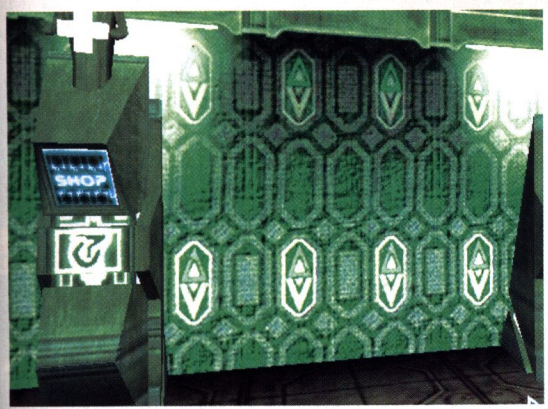
You are now in the newbie training grounds. Take some time to look around. Notice the booths with question marks. You can shift and left-click on these to get more information on what they are. Press i to bring up your inventory (Figure 6) and left-click and drag your shirt and weapon to your character slot on the right of the screen. (You will have to scroll up to find this – use your mouse wheel to do this if you have one.) You also have a healing kit and first aid kit. Right-clicking this will restore health lost in battle. Your starting nano crystal as an adventurer is Quick Heal. Nano crystals are *AO*'s equivalent of spells. You can right-click this to put it in your spell bank, but you have to meet the skill requirements needed to use it. Bring up the skill screen by clicking on skills at the bottom of the screen (Figure 7). Shift-left-click on the nano crystal to find out which skills you need to use it, and adjust them accordingly on the skill screen by putting IP (improvement points) into the necessary skill (you will find nano skills under the section Nano and Aiding).

You are now ready to kill something in the face. Find a victim – a snake or a reet will do (left-click on it to select it as a target), and press Q to attack your target with your weapon (Figure 8). Note that the colour of the target indicates its difficulty level. Green ones are generally easy, yellow are harder, and red will hand your arse to you on a plate. You get more experience points for killing harder enemies, but you will have to pick easy targets to start with until you get better weapons and armour later in the game.

THE NEXT STEP

As you successfully kill more creatures you will gain experience and move up in level. Stay in the training ground until you reach level three or four, then leave and enter the big bad city where you will find mission terminals, shops and places of interest. Missions will earn you money and items, and are a great way to get armour and equipment during the first ten levels. Feel free to explore the city and use the chat channels (particularly the ooc channels) to ask for advice from other players if you need it. (Select the channel and press enter to type a message for everyone in the channel to read.) Keep an eye on the shopping channels to see if anyone is selling items you need. Many people sell nano crystals in this channel for much less than you pay for them in the shops. Try to get into teams with other people too. Remember there is safety in numbers, and you will have to team with other people eventually to see the more advanced dungeons. For further help, press enter and type /help. This will give you advice on many things in the game, from the very basics to the more intricate parts of the interface. From here, you're on your own. Good luck and enjoy *Anarchy Online*. PCZ

THE GENERAL STORE IS YOUR FRIEND



Wherever you start, be sure to find the location of your general store. You can buy just about anything here, and this is the place where you will almost always buy your nano crystals, medi-kits and ammunition. If you are ever stuck in the game and you know you need something but don't know where to buy it, the chances are good that you will find it here.

FIG 6



FIG 7

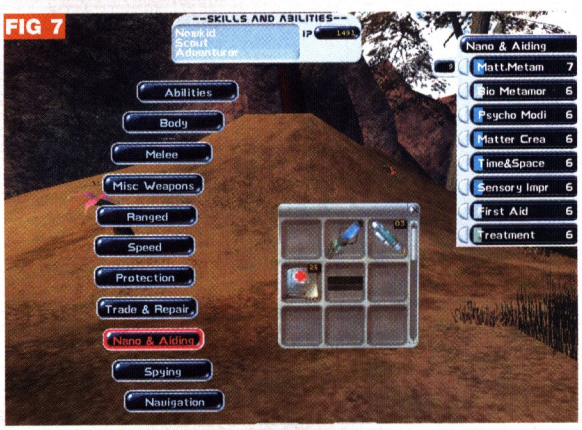


FIG 8





Relive the honor, the glory, and the triumph of the greatest aerial fighters ever to grace history books. Join the fray in a sprawling campaign, reenacting the *deadliest* sky battles in the European Theatre of World War II. Traverse over 1 million square miles of point-to-point accurate terrain as you and your squadron of elite aces strike at the ruthless Axis powers. *Feel* the sting of the flack and the rattle of incoming shells with one of the most detailed damage models ever. Test your meddle against *fourteen* flyable aircraft, each with real 3D cockpits and fully functioning dials and gauges. And if you find yourself surrounded by enemies, don't give up. You're not alone. You're part of the Attack Squadron.

Jane's
ATTACK SQUADRON

FROM Jane's COMBAT SIMULATIONS

DEVELOPED BY mad doc SOFTWARE

PUBLISHED BY XICAT INTERACTIVE

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FIGHT CLUB

***Martin Korda* announces the all-new Free-For-All**



Hop to it mate, there's a free-for-all to be fought.

THE PLAYING FIELDS may be gone, but the Readers' Free-For-All lives on regardless. Over the last few weeks we've been furiously working on our very own server and after hours of painstaking tests, we finally cracked it. So here is the all-new *PC ZONE* Readers' Free-For-All, made for you by us to allow us to totally humiliate you at online gaming. Well at least that's the plan, but as was shown in past Free-For-Alls, physical injury, faulty equipment, inebriation and a general lack of talent often prevented us from performing at our optimal levels. However, after a month of intense fitness training involving walking to the bus stop and lifting mugs brimming with tea above our heads, we're ready to resume hostilities. The only question is, do you think you can handle it? If the answer is yes, then mark Thursday March 21 in your diary and get practising on *Wolfenstein*'s Multiplayer mode. The *ZONE* crew will be on one side, and the first few on get to play with us. Remember if you're not with us, you're against us. You'll find the connection details in the subtly named box below – Free-For-All Connection Details. See you online.

FREE-FOR-ALL CONNECTION DETAILS

So you think you're good eh? Well here's your chance to learn some humility by joining our Free-For-All. This month, we'll be running a *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* server. To join the server, first select Multiplayer from the game's main menu. Once there, change the Source setting to Favourites and left-click on the New Favourite panel. Call it 'PCZONE' and in the IP Address column type 62.49.226.110:1043 followed by left-clicking on OK. Now left click on the Password box and type 'pczone' then left-click on OK. Hit Refresh to update your Favourites list. You should now see the PCZONE server in your Favourites list. Highlight it and then left-click on Accept. You should now be taken straight to the action. Maps will cycle every 15-20 minutes, and in order to get as many of you a game as possible we may have to rotate players.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Dave Woods	Kid Unknown
Richie Shoemaker	Zapatero
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Mark Hill	Leatherface
Paul Presley	I R Baboon
Matthew Cheshire	Burnside
Phil Clark	Shit Kicker
Danny King-Smith	Ronin
Colin Mackleworth	M.A.C.H.I.N.E

FREE-FOR-ALL

Thursday 21 March

6.30pm – 9.30pm

***Return To Castle Wolfenstein* server**

PC ZONE GAME SERVERS Provided by www.games-world.net

THE *PC ZONE* GAME SERVERS ARE NOW MORE POPULAR THAN EVER AND TO ENSURE ONLY *PC ZONE* READERS CAN PLAY ON THEM, WE'VE DECIDED TO PASSWORD THEM ALL. DON'T WORRY THOUGH, EVERY MONTH WE'LL BE PRINTING THE PASSWORD YOU NEED TO GET FRAGGING

Quake III: Arena Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.24.27966
Quake III: Fortress Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.24.27968

Counter-Strike Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.49:27015
Counter-Strike Public Server #2 – 194.93.134.49:27020
Counter-Strike Public Server #3 – 194.93.134.51:27015
Counter-Strike Public Server #4 – 194.93.134.51:27020
(PC ZONE map pack)

Unreal Tournament Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.52:7787
Unreal Tournament Public Server #2 – 194.93.134.52:7777

Team Fortress Classic Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.50:27015
Team Fortress Classic Public Server #2 – 194.93.134.50:27020

PASSWORD: **phone**

LAN ROVER

If you're looking for some great LAN-based gaming you're in luck, Steve 'Scalper' Randall's here with a selection of this month's finest gatherings...

■ A good place to start would be www.gdbok.co.uk, since any game goes at the Leicester Networking Games Club. So make a date on March 2 and 30 at Spinney Hill Working Men's Club, Frisby Road, Leicester, from 12noon-midnight, £7.50 for non-members or £5 members.

■ Contact dawa.sniper@btinternet.com for a specialist LAN playing only *Baldur's Gate*. It's happening March 29-31, at Harraton & District Community Association, Bone Mill Lane, Fatfield, Washington, Tyne & Wear, and costs £15.

■ I will also be doing a specialist LAN around the middle of April. The game is yet to be decided but you can vote for your favourite at www.gglan.co.uk. It will take place in the Conference room, Queen Mary College, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS, and costs £25.00.

■ www.hglan.co.uk will be running its usual all-game extravaganza from March 29-31, also in the Conference room at the Queen Mary College (see above).

■ www.oxlan.co.uk will take up to 80 people at £30 each with prizes and a separate sleeping area on March 16-17 at Kennington Village Hall, Kennington, Oxford. Two PCs and £100 can be won in the competitions here.

■ www.multiplay.co.uk are asking for £70 from 1,000 people for four days gaming from March 29-April 1 at Newbury Racecourse, Newbury.

If you want me to mention your LAN, let me know two months in advance or come to my LAN and bring beer or bribes. I'm at stevie@arsenalfc.net.

THE PCZONE A-LIST

SHOOTERS

MEDAL OF HONOR



It may have taken years but finally there's a shooter worthy of toppling *Half-Life*. Brilliant level design, surprisingly good AI, an unparalleled sense of atmosphere and intensity, not to mention beautifully scripted scenes. It's also the first game that Richie has finished three times in as many months, and the first FPS Rhianna has finished in her life, which gives you some indication of the game's worth.

PUB EA **DEV** 2015

PCZ ISSUE 112



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Valve Software **PCZ ISSUE 71**



ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

If we rated games on atmosphere and tension *AvP2* would've been the highest-scoring game ever. The multiplayer game and 3D engine brought the score down, but for scares nothing can touch this three-way fragfest.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Monolith **PCZ ISSUE 110**



MAX PAYNE

It's not big and it's not clever, but for style and content *Max Payne* receives top marks. The character animations and soon-to-be-copied-by-everyone Bullet Time mode are the real stars, it's just a shame it only lasts a few hours.

PUB Take 2 **DEV** Remedy **PCZ ISSUE 107**



RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

A mixed bag. Visually it might be at the top of the pile, but the single-player game has been completely eclipsed by *Medal Of Honor*. Forget that and head for the multiplayer action instead, where the game comes into its own.

PUB Activision **DEV** Gray Matter/Nerve **PCZ ISSUE 112**



UNREAL TOURNAMENT

Unreal Tournament's multiplayer mode is more than a match for *Quake III*, with a combination of well-designed maps and diverse gameplay. Single-player mode is a tad short, but it's still more of a challenge than most.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Epic/Digital Extremes **PCZ ISSUE 81**



QUAKE III ARENA

Still going strong with a constant stream of mods and add-ons, *Quake III* is probably the best game for pure deathmatch multiplayer, but in terms of numbers it's trounced online by *Half-Life* and *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Activision **DEV** id **PCZ ISSUE 87**



SERIOUS SAM: THE SECOND ENCOUNTER

This time around the game is bigger, longer and the graphics are even better than before. Not a serious challenge to the FPS crown, but for *Doom*-style retro action with a brilliant new engine, this can't be beat.

PUB Take 2 **DEV** Croteam **PCZ ISSUE 112**



CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING

This atmospheric shooter is one of the most unsettling we've seen and the superb graphics and sound will have you jumping like a little girl. A game that pushes the boundaries of narrative gameplay.

PUB EA **DEV** EALA **PCZ ISSUE 101**



TRIBES 2

If you're after quality co-operative action in expansive outdoor environments with superb visuals and smooth play, there's no better place to go than online with *Tribes 2*. If you're not much of a team player then steer clear.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Dynamix **PCZ ISSUE 103**

STRATEGY

SHOGUN: WARLORDS



Take command of enormous armies, engage in epic and bloody battles, send ninjas to assassinate generals and conquer your way through feudal Japan. This edition further improves the game's capable 3D engine, gives you greater customisation over your units and also lets you play as the Mongols. Copious in-game options never get in the way of the instant playability. *Shogun* will blow you away.

PUB EA **DEV** Creative Assembly

PCZ ISSUE 89



COMMANDOS 2

There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive, preposterously detailed follow-up even more.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Pyro Studio **PCZ ISSUE 108**



COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS

There are 8,000 troops at your disposal in this historically accurate RTS. Smooth unit movement, a 3D landscape with real physics modelling and great graphics and sound make it truly absorbing. An essential purchase.

PUB CDV **DEV** GSC Gameworld **PCZ ISSUE 101**



Z: STEEL SOLDIERS

Z will re-ignite your passion for strategy games with its fast-paced in-yer-face action that allows you to get down and dirty from the off. The AI is superb, and as it's entirely mouse-driven, it's simple and easy to get into.

PUB EON **DEV** Bitmap Brothers **PCZ ISSUE 101**



ETHERLORDS

This unexpected gem might just be good enough to convert those who immediately associate 'turn-based' with the word 'geek'. The visuals and sound are stunning, the tactical variety truly staggering – fantastic stuff.

PUB JoWood **DEV** Nival Interactive **PCZ ISSUE 112**



BATTLE REALMS

Emerging from the quagmire of all too similar RTS games this is a genuinely ground-breaking strategy game. It does have its flaws which include a tedious plot, but the great use of sound, visuals and gameplay shine through.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** Liquid Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 111**



AOEII: GOLD EDITION

It might not be radically different from the original, but sometimes evolution is just as good as revolution. In *AOEII* the gameplay is honed to perfection with balanced units and strong single and multiplayer campaigns. A great RTS.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Ensemble Studios **PCZ ISSUE 84**



SUDDEN STRIKE

Sudden Strike mixes WWII action with a heavy dose of realism in order to create a compelling strategy title. Its large-scale battles, huge selection of units and superb interface make it a must for RTS fans.

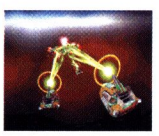
PUB CDV **DEV** Fireglow **PCZ ISSUE 96**



SHATTERED GALAXY

This hugely involving online game combines a monthly *EverQuest*-style subscription-based role-playing experience with massive *Total Annihilation*-influenced combat. Only available from the States, but well worth the price.

PUB www.sgalaxy.com **DEV** Nexon **PCZ ISSUE 108**



HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM

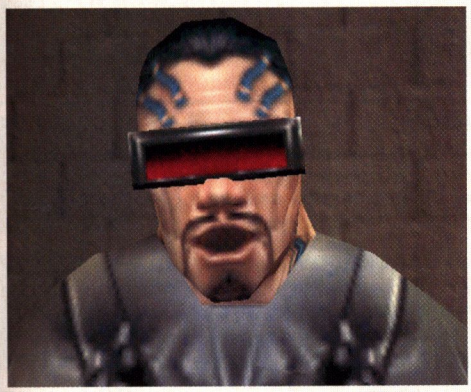
Relic's mission to improve the already superb 3D RTS *Homeworld* has proved to be a great success. The *Homeworld* universe has been expanded with a more elaborate storyline and greater scope for tactical options than ever.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Barking Dog **PCZ ISSUE 96**

Welcome to the all-new *PC ZONE* A-List, the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages aren't just good, they're the best of the best in their respective genres, and our list is continually updated to show how each game stands in relation to its peers. Get in.

◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

DEUS EX



Warren Spector is one of the true visionaries of the computer game medium, and this is his opus. Combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming. The fascinating sci-fi plot and amazing attention to detail, combined with unparalleled player freedom are just some of the reasons why *Deus Ex* is a landmark in gaming.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm

PCZ ISSUE 93



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Black Isle Studio **PCZ ISSUE 87**



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA **DEV** Irrational Games **PCZ ISSUE 80**



DARK AGE OF CAMELOT

With some of the best graphics seen in an MMORPG, *Dark Age Of Camelot* creates an atmospheric, engaging and open-ended world. The scale of battles alone should ensure it remains above *EverQuest* for a good few months.

PUB Koch Media **DEV** Mythic Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE112**



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential for anyone interested in PC role-playing.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Bioware **PCZ ISSUE 96**



THRONE OF DARKNESS

An enjoyable party-based strategic hack 'n' slash from the developers of *Diablo* sees you take command of seven samurai as they fight their way through feudal Japan. Not for everyone, granted, but worth a look.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Click Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 96**



DIABLO II

The sequel to the definitive hack 'n' slash took all the qualities of the original into a massive world of beautifully simplistic yet compelling gameplay. With a huge online community and an excellent expansion, *DII* is as addictive as ever.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Blizzard **PCZ ISSUE 84**



EVERQUEST

Probably the most notorious of all online RPGs, *EverQuest* has gone from strength to strength with a total of three expansion packs. A beautiful if repetitive game that has claimed the souls of thousands worldwide.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** Verant **PCZ ISSUE 80**



ARCANUM

Whether you play through as a mage or a techy, you'll still find *Arcanum* hugely entertaining. Don't let its looks fool you, it's got a great plot and pleasingly flexible character development. May be too hardcore for some.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Troika Games **PCZ ISSUE 107**



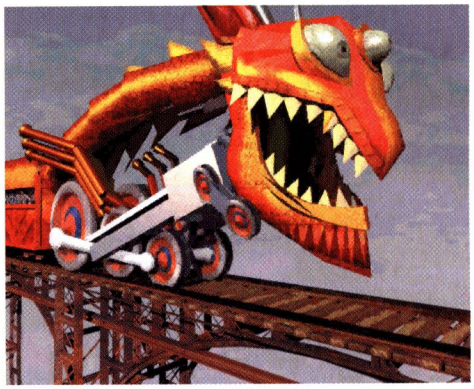
ANACHRONOX

Inspired by Japanese RPGs like *Final Fantasy*, *Anachronox* proves *Deus Ex* wasn't a fluke for Ion Storm. It doesn't look great, but it has humour and loads to do and there's nothing else like it on PC – more's the pity.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm **PCZ ISSUE106**

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

GRIM FANDANGO



If you've followed the successes of LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must-buy. The comic interaction between Manny and Glottis is a high watermark for scripting in games, while sublime graphics and laugh-out-loud humour ensure it's at the top of its genre. A word of warning though: it's bloody hard and if your mind doesn't work laterally you'll be playing it until the day you die.

PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts

PCZ ISSUE 71



SOUL REAVER 2

While this latest episode in the saga of Raziel takes few risks with the action/adventure formula, it's a consummately constructed example of the genre, with a compelling storyline, satisfying combat and excellent puzzle dynamics.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Crystal Dynamics **PCZ ISSUE 111**



DISCWORLD NOIR

Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and all the better for it in our opinion.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Perfect Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 79**



SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS

Anyone who doesn't mind being splattered with the kind of gore rarely seen outside *Soldier of Fortune* will find much to like in *Severance*. But it stands out from the usual hack 'n' slasher with its amazing engine and combo system.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Rebel Act Studios **PCZ ISSUE 98**



THE NOMAD SOUL

Distinctly odd, but original nonetheless. *The Nomad Soul* is a huge intricate world populated by lap dancers and David Bowie. At turns adventure, beat 'em up and platformer, it's insanely ambitious and almost pulls it off.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Quantic Dream **PCZ ISSUE 83**



HITMAN: CODENAME 47

Reminiscent of *Leon* and *Day of the Jackal*, *Hitman* recreates the excitement of carrying out a contract killing. Snipe from rooftops, disguise yourself in your victims' uniforms and walk away from explosions with calm elegance.

PUB Eidos **DEV** IO Interactive **PCZ ISSUE 98**



PROJECT EDEN

Giving you control of four variously skilled operatives in a nightmarish future metropolis, *Eden* is at once predictable and innovative. The combat and AI may be dull, but the varied puzzles and raft of cool gadgetry make up for it.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Core Design **PCZ ISSUE 107**



INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

LucasArts moves away from the point-and-click genre and into *Tomb Raider* territory for its latest Indy game, but with many of the adventure elements still in place. The result is surprisingly good, but not for traditionalists.

PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts **PCZ ISSUE 84**



ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND

One of the hardest things to do in a game is to make your audience laugh with you rather than at you, and *Escape From Monkey Island* is undoubtedly one of the most genuinely funny games to come out in recent years.

PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts **PCZ ISSUE 98**



METAL GEAR SOLID

Although it's been ported pretty much identically from the console version (with a few graphical improvements), *MGS*'s tense gameplay, well-designed levels and variety of challenging bosses make it a thing of beauty.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Konami **PCZ ISSUE 96**

GOD GAMES

BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game both breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on, *Creature Isle*, is also available which cuts down on micro-management and lets you guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Overall we think it's pure genius in a box.

PUB EA **DEV** Lionhead Studios

PCZ ISSUE 100



CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Firaxis Games **PCZ ISSUE 111**



THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthily long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, but you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucketload.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis/EA **PCZ ISSUE 87**



CAESAR III

Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Impressions **PCZ ISSUE 70**



SIMCITY 3000

Ten years on, the offspring of the original building game *Sim City* still remains as addictive as it ever was. Little was broken, and little was fixed. With new buildings and an enhanced transport system, *SimCity 3000* is a must for old-timers and new addicts alike.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis **PCZ ISSUE 74**



ZEUS: MASTER OF OLYMPUS

Straight from the creators of *Pharaoh* and *Caesar III* comes this intricate yet hugely playable micro-management god game. Despite its slightly cartoonish look *Zeus* is highly addictive, but suffers slightly from its lack of multiplayer options and an undeveloped combat system.

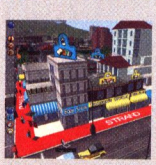
PUB VU Games **DEV** Impressions Games **PCZ ISSUE 97**



ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON

Design and build your own theme park and then pack it full of the most fiendish rides your imagination can conjure up, while trying to keep the cash and the punters coming in. From rickety wooden dippers to Nemesis-style, white-knuckle gurners, *RollerCoaster Tycoon* is hugely addictive. Be warned.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Chris Sawyer **PCZ ISSUE 75**



MONOPOLY TYCOON

This mixture of the classic board game and a *Theme Park/SimCity*-style building sim is an admirable attempt at something a little different. Played in real time, the aim is to make as much money as possible. Great fun for a while, but it quickly becomes repetitive.

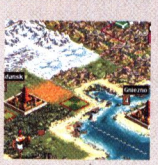
PUB Infogrames **DEV** Deep Red **PCZ ISSUE 110**



DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA **DEV** Bullfrog **PCZ ISSUE 79**



CALL TO POWER II

It might not have the official endorsement, but *Call To Power II* is a spiritual successor to one of the greatest strategy games of all time, *Civilization II*. The gameplay is familiar but every element has been polished and the result is a hugely challenging and rewarding experience. Still well worth seeking out.

PUB Activision **DEV** Activison **PCZ ISSUE 98**

3D ACTION / STRATEGY

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD



Now available with the tricky Red Hammer add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104



GHOST RECON

A superb squad-based shooter, which masterfully combines tactics and action. The levels range from wide-open landscapes to claustrophobic city streets, in what is a stunning evocation of special forces warfare.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** Red Storm Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 110**



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS

Looking old and with most of the original bugs intact, *Hidden & Dangerous* is still a great WWII game featuring some incredibly varied levels and a stirring soundtrack. Look out for the supposedly bug-free Deluxe release next issue.

PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion Softworks **PCZ ISSUE 79**



HOSTILE WATERS

A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or up close and personal. Inspired by the 16-bit classic *Carrier Command*, it's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options.

PUB Rage **DEV** Rage Software **PCZ ISSUE 101**



GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO

This mammoth and original 3D action/strategy game includes RTS, RPG, real-time and third-person-shooter combat elements. It's also rather funny and features near-naked women with blue skin.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Planet Moon Studios **PCZ ISSUE 95**

RACING GAMES

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2.0



Despite the plucky challenge from *Rally Championship Xtreme*, *Colin McRae Rally 2.0* is still the benchmark rally title and looks set to remain so until *Colin McRae 3.0* turns up later in the year. The graphics are fantastic, the detail is overwhelming and the cars handle beautifully. If you're on the look-out for the definitive rally game, this is it – and it's cheap now as well.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 98



RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP XTREME

This equals *Colin McRae Rally 2.0* as the top PC driving game, but the fact that it costs three times as much means it doesn't quite claim the top spot. It plays beautifully and even comes with online options. An essential rally game.

PUB Actualize **DEV** Actualize **PCZ ISSUE 110**



MIDTOWN MADNESS 2

Buckle up for some high-speed action as you race around London and San Francisco. The original *MM* was a belter, but with improved cars, races and controls, this is even better. We reckon it's the definitive arcade racer.

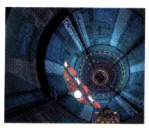
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Angel Studios **PCZ ISSUE 96**



F1 2001

The most versatile *F1* game to date, with a full-on sim mode and an arcade setting for those who can't hack it. It looks great, but it comes with a huge caveat – if you want to see it as intended you're going to need a hefty machine.

PUB EA **DEV** EA Sport **PCZ ISSUE 109**



BALLISTICS

So you thought *WipEout* was fast? Well, welcome to a new concept in pure racing. It only has seven tracks, but *Ballistics* has unparalleled speed, with a simple control system that keeps the emphasis on racing dynamics.

PUB Xicat **DEV** GRIN **PCZ ISSUE 111**

FLIGHT SIMS

IL-2 STURMOVIK



Combining incredible atmosphere, sound and visuals with possibly the most realistic flight model to date, *IL-2* puts you behind the flight stick of a number of stunningly reproduced WWII combat planes. The attention to detail is breathtaking and the easy-to-use editor allows endless months of replayability. A must-have for any real combat flight sim fanatic.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** 1C: Maddox Games

PCZ ISSUE 110



MS FLIGHT SIM 2002

With more polish than previous versions, this professional edition offers players more planes, extra flight loggings and improved graphics. It might not be able to teach you how to fly, but it's the closest you'll get without paying for lessons.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** BAO **PCZ ISSUE 111**



BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually feel 'right'. Tally ho!

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Rowan Software **PCZ ISSUE 103**



FALCON 4

We waited patiently for years for this title to arrive, and the good news is that, for once, we weren't disappointed. *Falcon 4* features incredible 3D-accelerated graphics and a dynamic campaign structure.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Microprose **PCZ ISSUE 72**



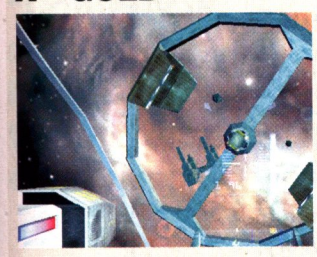
B-17: THE MIGHTY 8TH

B-17 reproduces the experience of piloting a World War II bomber. Just about everything is covered, from planning missions to dropping bombs. A must for WWII and realism freaks everywhere.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Wayward Simulations **PCZ ISSUE 96**

SPACE COMBAT

X – GOLD



The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this massive trading epic from Germany, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. The combat model may not be the best on offer, but with goods to trade and races to discover, it rewards patience with variety and months of absorbing gameplay. Deeply hypnotic and beautiful rather than tense and frenetic.

PUB THQ **DEV** Egosoft

PCZ ISSUE 82



TERMINUS

Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion and we reckon it just edges out the mighty *FreeSpace 2*.

PUB www.macgames.co.uk **DEV** Vicarious Visions **PCZ ISSUE 93**



FREESPACE 2

Following in the footsteps of *Wing Commander* and *X-Wing*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. With an epic story and amazing graphics, it suffers from being a bit short-lived if you don't play online.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Volition Inc **PCZ ISSUE 84**



EDGE OF CHAOS: INDEPENDENCE WAR 2

This title is likely to appeal more to the die-hard space simmers, but *Edge Of Chaos* still goes some way towards advancing the genre. Its graphics and absorbing freeform gaming are inspirational.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Particle Systems **PCZ ISSUE 104**



JUMPGATE

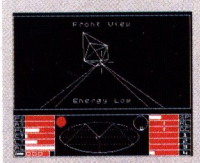
It may not be the nicest-looking of the new breed of MMORPGs but *Jumpgate* is still an immersive space combat and trading game experience. With a great player community and good customer service, it makes for a great package.

DEV Netdevil/Mightygames **WEB** www.mightgames.co.uk **PCZ ISSUE 107**

ALL TIME CLASSICS



THE TRUTH IS OUT. VETERAN ZONE WRITER *KEITH PULLIN* IS A TEARY-EYED NOSTALGIC OF THE HIGHEST ORDER. THESE ARE HIS TOP TEN CLASSIC GAMES OF ALL TIME...



ELITE (SPECTRUM 48K)

I can't think of any other game, save possibly *Championship Manager*, that I have dedicated more time to. My dad even confiscated it from me during my GCSEs thinking it would affect my revision. "You'll never get a job playing games for a living," he lectured. Which just goes to show how right he was.



STREETFIGHTER 2 TURBO (SNES)

If you phoned the Nintendo hotline between 1992 and 1994 the chances are nobody was listening to a word you said. Callers became a droning background irritation in our headsets whilst our concentration was 100 per cent focused on performing dragon punches, tiger uppercuts and spinning bird kicks. And you wondered why the advice you got never worked.



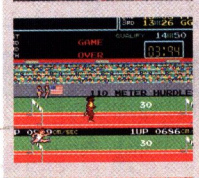
STARQUAKE (SPECTRUM 48K)

I'm still stunned that Steve Crow seems to have disappeared from the face of the planet. How can someone create such a supremely playable shooter and not be around today making more? Steve Crow, wherever you are, whatever you're doing, stop it now and come back to us. We need you.



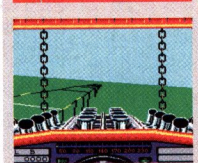
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER (AMIGA/PC)

I hate it. I hate it. I hate it. Every time a new version is released I tell myself I can resist. But no matter how hard I try, the truth is I relapse every time, and after a couple of months of uninterrupted play only a timely ultimatum from my girlfriend snaps me back into temporary reality.



TRACK & FIELD (ARCADE)

This was my weakness in the mid '80s, and I'm not sure I've entirely recovered. Nowadays whenever I chance upon it in some forgotten and windswept seafront arcade, I go weak at the knees and pump as much cash as I possibly can into its greedy little mouth. Still can't suss that bloody hammer throw though.



STUNT CAR RACER (AMIGA)

Please, nobody ever remake this game. To do so would crap upon the memory of one of the most ingenious racing games of all time. Hurtling around rollercoaster tracks in a souped-up dune buggy with marshmallow suspension is not something you attempt twice and get away with, believe me.



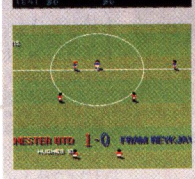
ISS PRO EVOLUTION 2 (PSX)

With only one other exception (and we'll get to that shortly) arcade football games have a lot to answer for. *ISS Pro* though is true poetry in motion and pummels into submission anything the PC has to offer. Slick passing, realistic runs, great animation and supreme gameplay make it a classic and boots the *FIFA* series into touch.



TAI-PAN (SPECTRUM 128K)

Modern seafaring trading games are pitiful compared to this liquid gem from Ocean Software. You could press-gang drunken townies into joining your scurvy-ridden crew, board other ships in a top-down *Gauntlet*-type sub-game, and even pop into a brothel for some well-earned downtime. They don't make 'em like that anymore.



SENSIBLE SOCCER (AMIGA/PC)

Sensible Soccer was the *ISS Pro* of the '90s. Hardly a day passed by without Steve Hill and myself squeezing a few sneaky games in during our time on the now defunct *PC Power*. Unfortunately the sneaky games soon escalated into full-blown office tournaments and frankly, it's little wonder the magazine folded.



BLACK & WHITE (PC)

Oh come on. How can I leave this one out? *Black & White* will go down in history as one of the games that changed the way we look at AI. Sure, there are some minor gameplay flaws, but the concept is still ground-breaking and it brings a smile to my face every time I play it.

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RETRO ZONE MARCH 1992

Ten years ago this very month, and your super, soaraway *ZONE* wasn't even a twinkle in the games industry's eye. *Paul Presley* rubs the crystal ball of nostalgia...



MONKEY ISLAND II: LECHUCK'S REVENGE

Guybrush Threepwood returns to the hilarious high seas

FEW GAMING SAGAS have had the long-lasting impact on our collective psyches as the hysterical *Monkey Island* series, and few would argue that the finest of the lot was this second outing for famed pirate wannabe Guybrush Threepwood.

Comedy is always the hardest thing to pull off in computer games, but back in the '90s, LucasArts seemed to have a monopoly on it, with Ron Gilbert and co proving that Americans *did* have a sense of humour and *did* understand irony.

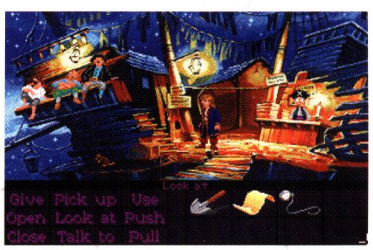
Once again Guybrush finds himself on the receiving end of the ghost pirate LeChuck's schemes, while trying to balance a burgeoning relationship with Elaine and hunting for buried treasure. The 'twist' ending was patently designed to end the series, but a Gilbert-less LucasArts decided to carry on regardless several years later with a couple of inferior sequels.

Gilbert himself went on to form CaveDog Studios and the strategy hit *Total Annihilation* before packing it all in for a career in educational software. Shame really, as games have never been funny since. Come back Ron, we could use a good laugh.

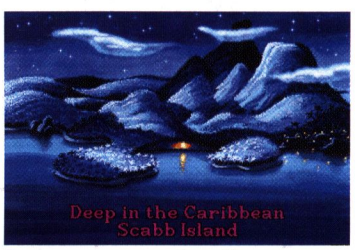
"Comedy is always the hardest thing to pull off in computer games"



Is that Tom Cruise?



Familiar faces abound.



Anyone remember *Loom*?

THE BEST OF THE REST →



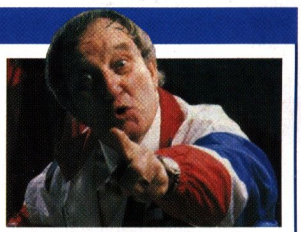
Eye Of The Beholder II
(Atari ST/Amiga/PC)
Ultima Underworld (see next page) may have won all the plaudits, but there was another subterranean dungeon hack doing the rounds that was just as popular. *Eye Of The Beholder* was an attempt to take AD&D and put it in first-person clothing, albeit turn-based, limited-option, nerd-friendly ones.



Desert Strike
(Megadrive)
1992 saw the world deeply engrossed in the Gulf War as EA took it upon themselves to cash in with a spot of propaganda. Flying around an isometric desertscape, blowing up oil pipes, missile bases and the like proved to be so popular that yet another long-running console franchise was born.



4D Sports Driving
(Atari ST/Amiga/PC)
Or 'Stunts' if you were American (the concept of four dimensions proving too tricky). Actually this classic stunt car sim was rooted firmly in the three-dimensional world, but combining the world of stunt cars with rollercoasters proved to be a winning formula. Boxing and tennis titles followed, both just as good.



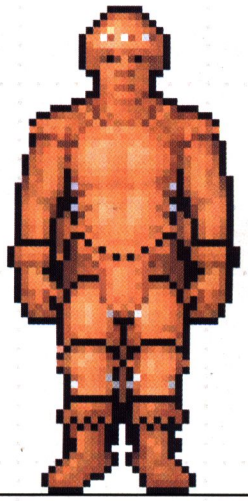
Championship Manager
(PC)
And so begins another long-running franchise (it seems 1992 was quite big for this kind of thing). The first of the *ChampMan* games wasn't pretty or much fun, but it must have had something going for it as we all know what happened next. Cross-referenced database spreadsheets have never been so exciting.

NEWS

GAMING NEWS FROM MARCH 1992

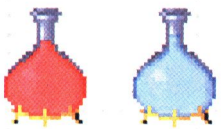
Arcade centres across the country take delivery of the future of gaming – virtual reality pods. For a mere three quid per go you could lose all the last shreds of your dignity as you strapped a plastic blindfold to your head and waved your arms about like a gimp, pretending to be chased by a badly rendered pterodactyl.

Today's gamers have to suffer the likes of *Thumb Bandits* and *Bits*, but back in the heyday of gaming, there was only one show worth watching: *Gamesmaster*. Dominik Diamond was the host and challenges included the stellar sights of John Fashanu playing a footie game.



GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

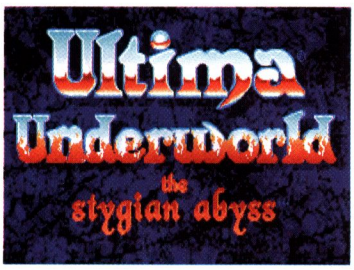
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD



Welcome to a brand new series focusing on games that changed the face of PC gaming. *Paul Mallinson* kicks off by chatting to the creators of *Ultima Underworld*, and finds out just what it takes to come up with a classic



GAME Ultima Underworld
DEVELOPER Blue Sky Productions
RELEASED March 1992
INFLUENCED Immersive action gaming and role-playing



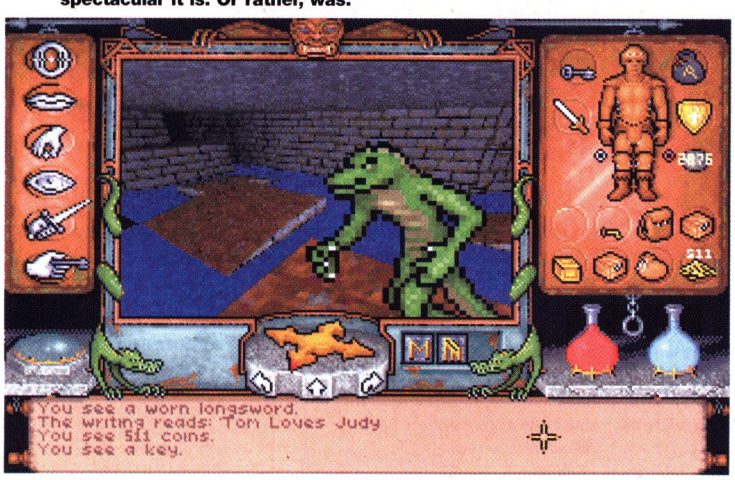
Although the graphics appear blocky here, *Ultima Underworld* really has to be seen moving to appreciate how blummin spectacular it is. Or rather, was.

A COUPLE OF fundamental myths surround the conception, birth and being of the very first *Ultima Underworld* adventure – one of the greatest and most influential role-playing games ever made. First myth: that Origin was responsible for making the game. Bzzzt! Wrong! Although Origin published the game (which was distributed by US Gold in the UK at the time), *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss* (to give the first game its full title), was in fact created in whole by Blue Sky Productions – a small New Hampshire-based development team who built its own software technology in 1990 and immediately struck up a publishing deal with Origin. After the game's release, and thanks to some overly enthusiastic press, Origin was – wrongly – hailed as 'the gaming company responsible for *Ultima Underworld*'. A mistake they did little to address.

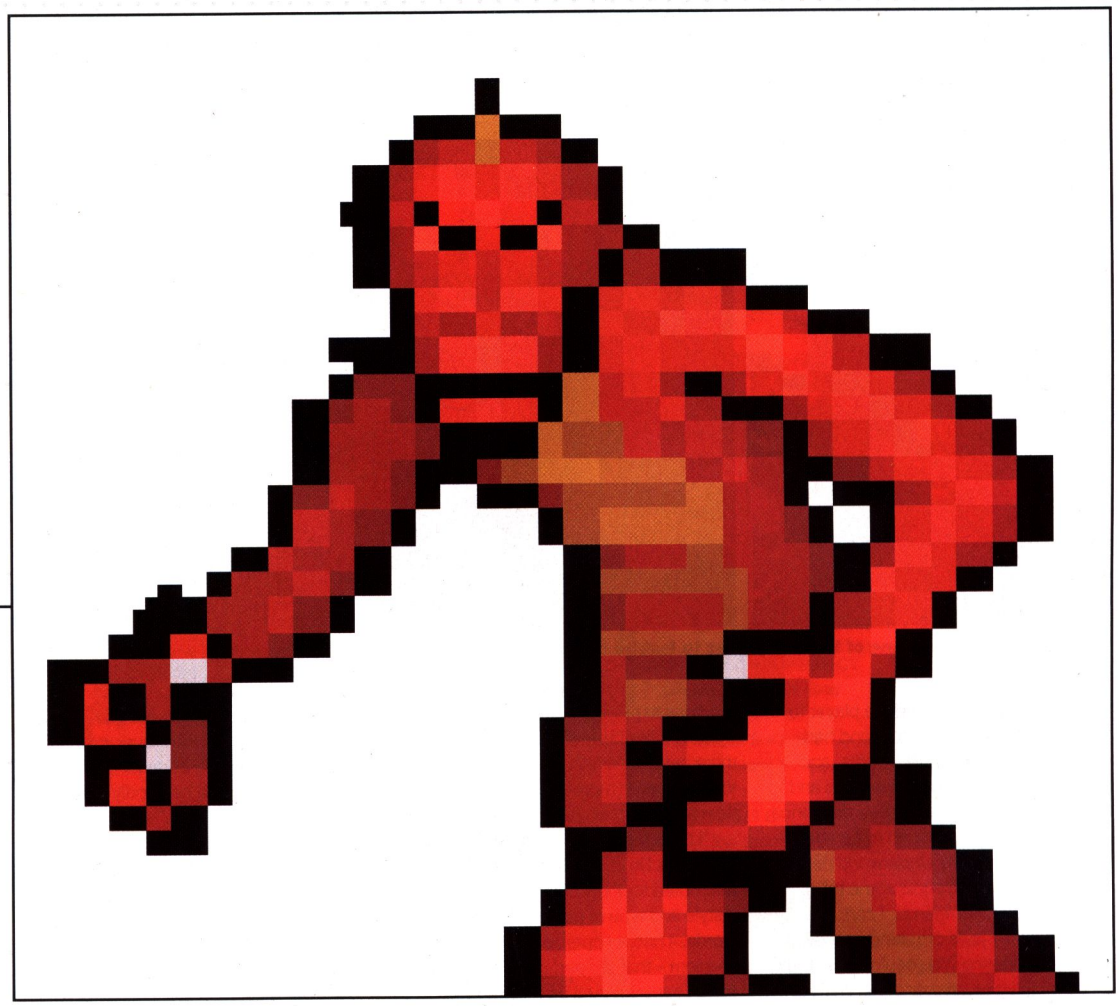
Why the confusion? Quite simply, because of the 'Ultima' name. *Underworld* was the first of the infamous *Ultima* series to be developed by a studio outside of Origin. Up until that point, all the *Ultimas* had been the brainchild of Richard Garriot and developed by in-house teams. Furthermore, *Ultima* was Origin's premier brand at the time, and they were understandably protective of the franchise. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that in the game's press and marketing there was scant mention of Blue Sky. Many assumed (and still assume) that *Underworld* was, like prior *Ultimas*, created within Origin. They were (and still are) wrong.

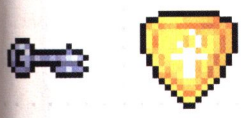
Second myth: that Warren '*Deus Ex*' Spector created *Ultima Underworld*. Bzzzt! Wrong again! At the end of the day it was very much a team effort, though if one person had to be singled out as 'the creator of *Ultima Underworld*' it would have to be Paul Neurath – a D&D fan who learnt how to program at college during the '70s – and, notably, the guy who came up with the idea of crossing a dungeon game with real-time, flight simulator-style graphics…

Another key player in the *Ultima Underworld* success story was programmer Doug Church – the man









who made the 3D visuals so amazing to look at. Industry guru and immersive gaming specialist Warren Spector was indeed the producer on both *Ultima Underworld* games, though he arrived very late in the schedule on the first game. But, as Warren points out when you ask him, he did "sweat blood" over *Underworld* once on board.

Paul Neurath expands on this: "Not long after *Underworld*'s release, Blue Sky Productions merged with another developer and became Looking Glass. This added another layer of confusion in the game's lineage. One steady voice throughout this period was Warren, who as producer for *Underworld* and its sequel, often became Origin's spokesperson for the games. That was why people began to associate the game with Warren."

CONCEPTION OF A CLASSIC

So that's the myths settled, now onto the game itself. As anyone lucky enough to have played *Ultima Underworld* at the time will already know, this was a game that broke the mould. It blew everyone away at the time – 1992 – to be precise.

"Actually," says Paul, "the concept for *Underworld* first came up in 1989, after I had finished a game called *Space Rogue* for Origin. *Space Rogue* took the first, tentative steps in exploring a blend of RPG and simulation elements, and this seemed to me a promising direction. However, I didn't like the jarring way that *Space Rogue* took the player from the simulation of flying around, which was done in 3D, to the RPG play, which was done with traditional top-down 'tile' graphics. I felt that there ought to be a seamless way to meld these elements, and thereby create a more immersive experience." And there was. Paul had been experimenting with a primitive texture-mapping algorithm on the Apple IIe system he had at the time, though it ran too slowly to be of practical use.

"I thought that on a faster IBM PC it just might be feasible, and with such a technology one could create lifelike 3D interior spaces for an entire game world." And from these threads sprung the concept for *Underworld*.

"I wrote a high-concept design in the winter of 1990," says Paul, "and contracted with an ex-Origin artist, Doug Wike, to render an animation that emulated what the final game might look like. Then in the spring I formed Blue Sky, and brought on board the core team to develop the game. This included Doug Church and Dan Schmidt – who proved to be masterful programmers – Doug Wike as lead artist, and myself as creative director."

The team got a running demo up in short order that let the player run around in texture-mapped 3D dungeon corridors. It was primitive stuff by today's standards, but at that time nobody had seen anything like it.

"Demo in hand," Paul continues, "we pitched the *Underworld* concept to various publishers. Origin liked what it saw, and suggested that we set the game in the *Ultima* mythos and brand it as an 'Ultima'. We hadn't actually contemplated this of course when we came up with the original design – and it had not been set in Britannia. But we thought this was a fine idea, signed a publishing deal with Origin that summer, and the game became *Ultima Underworld*."

GROUND-BREAKING TECHNIQUES

Like other *Ultima* games before it, in *Underworld* you took the role of the infamous Avatar: a bloke dragged from the real world to Britannia – a realm of swords, sorcery, monsters and magic – and who was usually dropped into some God-awful situation and expected to solve his way out of it. In the first *UU*, you – as the Avatar – are framed for kidnapping Baron Almric's daughter and are banished into the Great Stygian Abyss to either return the missing girl, or rot in hell forever.

Although the storyline could not be considered particularly original or innovative, the techniques used to bring the game to life certainly were. Technologically, Blue Sky pulled out the stops, as programmer Doug Church testifies: "We wanted to do a dungeon simulator and none of the programmers had really done this sort of game, so we were pretty ambitious and not too smart, basically. But it was the first 'indoor' real-

"It was the first 'indoor' realtime 3D game"

DOUG CHURCH
PROGRAMMER,
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD

PROFILES

We spoke to key members of the *UU* development team and found out what they've been up to...



NAME Paul Neurath
FIRST GAME *Deep Space* for Sir Tech
ROLE ON UU Design
NOW DOING Working for a new studio, FloodGate Entertainment, and focusing on online and multiplayer games: "I can't reveal any more or I'd have to kill you."

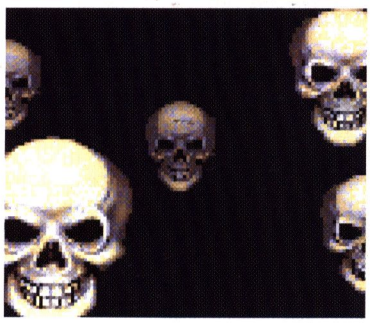


NAME Doug Church
FIRST GAME *Ultima Underworld*
ROLE ON UU Programmer
NOW DOING Consulting on various games. "I've had a year or two off from immersive sims and I'm definitely ready to get back to it."



NAME Warren Spector
FIRST GAME *Martian Dreams*
ROLE ON UU Origin Producer
NOW DOING Running Ion Storm Austin and working on *Deus Ex 2* and *Thief III*







***Ultima Underworld* was one of the first games to feature richly detailed non-player characters, most of whom you could talk to (before they punched you in the face).**

time 3D game that allowed the player to look up and down, and jump, and had chasms, lighting, multiple heights, and 3D objects such as doors, benches and ankhs." Which made a massive difference at the time, as Paul Neurath remembers:

"I brought an early *Underworld* demo to the West Coast to show some folks, including developer friends. I can remember their jaws dropping as they watched the demo. You could see in their eyes that the gaming world had shifted."

Up until that point gamers had grown accustomed to classic 'tile-based' RPGs such as *Dungeon Master*, which did not allow complete freedom of movement. "It was kinda slow, too," admits Doug, "though our quarter-screen view sort of made up for it." Admittedly the game was slow, even on a top-of-the-range-at-the-time 486DX2 66MHz, though that did little to dampen the enthusiasm of anyone who played it.

Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss shipped in March 1992 – two whole months before John '*Quake*' Carmack and Apogee released *Wolfenstein 3D* – something worth remembering if you assumed that *Wolfenstein* 'started' the whole 3D revolution.

"*Underworld* shipped before *Wolfenstein 3D*. We had shown id a demo the year before, and I remember John Carmack (who was all of about 19 at the time, and as yet unknown in the games industry) saying that he could write a faster texture mapper..." Doug Church warns that the *UU/Wolf 3D* engines were very different and that comparing them would be unfair. While we agree with Doug to some extent, in our humble opinion *Ultima Underworld* was a far bolder exercise in terms of fully realising the gaming environment. *Wolfenstein* may have been fast, but the levels were boxy and lacked the scope and realism of *UU*'s superbly organic designs. On top of that, *Underworld* went five or six steps further in terms of game design – with non-player characters, proper conversations, multiple solutions to problems, a rune-based magic system, a flexible inventory, and much more besides. Which, in our eyes, makes the game even more ground-breaking than many people give it credit for.

"I think the most important thing *UU* did," says Doug, "was the way in which it attempted to show the power and value of a style and type of gameplay." In other words, it had an open-endedness – a freedom – that shaped the way immersive action games would be made in the future. Though as Doug points out, not many games went in that direction until much later.

UNPARALLELED SUCCESS

It wasn't easy making a game like *Ultima Underworld* though. The game went into development in 1991, and, as Doug explains, they weren't short of problems.

"We ended up writing and rewriting many systems," he says, "as we explored what it meant to be a dungeon simulator. We tried three or four movement systems, for instance, and several combat models. We didn't know which aspects of the AI, say, were going to be most important for the player experience, so ended up writing code for many ideas which turned out to be largely irrelevant to the actual gameplay."

Critically, the game was an unparalleled success, one magazine going so far as to award the game six marks out of five. But was *UU* a commercial success?

"Sales were merely good out of the gate," says Paul Neurath, "and so Origin did not consider *Underworld* a hit. This dampened the enthusiasm a bit, and muted Origin's interest in the sequel. As a consequence, the *Underworlds* never got the level of marketing support that some of the other top Origin games received. Nevertheless, word of mouth carried *Underworld* sales for many years, and they managed to rack up half a million sales between the two titles, making them hits over the long haul."

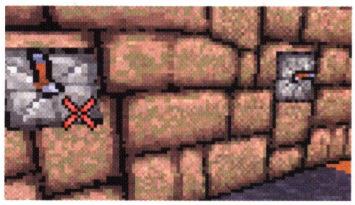
AFTER UNDERWORLD

Following the release of the second *Ultima Underworld* game – *Labyrinth Of Worlds* –

"I remember people's jaws dropping when they watched the demo"

PAUL NEURATH
CREATIVE DIRECTOR,
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD

Completing the game involved some clever lateral thinking puzzles.





both Paul and Doug, as well as many of their *UU* colleagues, took their experience to games such as *System Shock*, *Terra Nova* and *Thief* for Looking Glass Technologies – all of which represent further advances in this particular style of immersive action adventuring. Were the team not tempted to complete the *Underworld* trilogy instead?

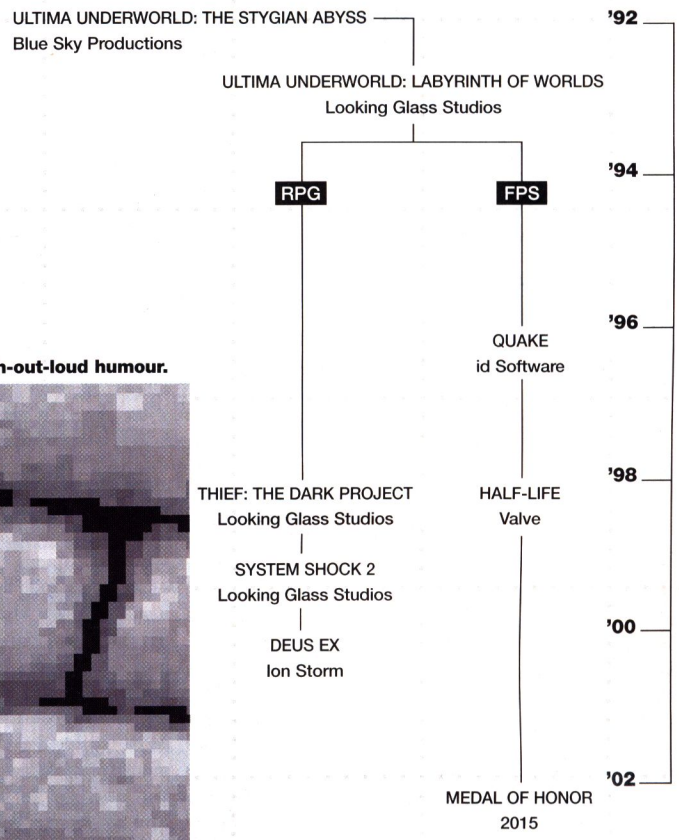
"We pitched *Ultima Underworld III* to Origin several times over the years," laments Paul, "but we were unable to generate sufficient interest." Apparently, it would now be up to Electronic Arts to green light a sequel, if there ever was one. However, there is some good news on the horizon. As Paul lets slip: "*Ultima Underworld* will be coming to the PocketPC shortly. I helped put together a licensing deal for ZIO Interactive to publish a conversion, and it has come a long way in terms of development – they're quite far along. The development team is a Korean group, but my group FloodGate Entertainment and Doug Church are helping out on some of the 3D programming, which is very cool."

A further enquiry to ZIO reveals that this will be available for download from its online shop some time in mid-February (www.ziosoft.com). Which is superb news, as both fans of the original and those new to *Ultima Underworld* will now be able to get hold of this once-lost classic, and experience its many and varied delights. Now *that* is very cool. PCZ

■ CHECK OUT THE FULL INTERVIEW
online at www.pczone.co.uk. You can also find an offline version on this month's DVD.

HOW UU CHANGED THE WORLD

Ultima Underworld inspired a generation of coders to go "free-look" 3D, shaping the future of immersive action-adventure gaming in the process.



The developers managed to stave off the 'beardyness' by injecting some surprising laugh-out-loud humour.





THE FUTURE: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?



Look out for a preview of Morrowind next issue.

"Ideally," says Doug Church hopefully, "we can get beyond games where the only form of player expression is what weapon you use to kill people." A tall order in today's weapon-obsessed marketplace, though advance word on *Deus Ex 2* hints that Ion Storm Austin are at least trying to move away from mindless killing as a prerequisite.

Paul Neurath offers more specific suggestions for the future: "Multiplayer design could definitely be made better. Multiplayer is a natural for *Underworld*-style games, and goes back to its roots in D&D teamplay. NPC behaviour could also be improved – getting NPCs to seem halfway believable is incredibly hard to pull off, but improvements in this area would have a huge payoff. Another good thing would be if gameplay could be made more open-ended." And we may get just that when immersive RPGs *Neverwinter Nights* and *Morrowind* are released later this year.

COMMENT

Online gaming is taking up more of our time then ever. *Martin Korda* wonders if we've already gone too far...



"How do we know when we're degenerating into gaming's equivalent of a pallid, anorak-wearing spod?"

ONLINE gaming, what's it all about? For some, it's the evil beginnings of a cataclysmic impingement of the virtual world on reality, the beginning of a future where information-addled families sit transfixed in front of cinema screen-sized TVs, dribbling into ready meals while immersed in an alternate universe, in pursuit of otherwise unattainable earthly pleasures. For others it's simply an escape from their lonely existence – forgotten dole blaggers intent on bumbling through life with as little contact with other people as is humanly possible. Within their virtual worlds they live out the life they can't be bothered to live in the real world, a futile attempt to convince themselves that their adopted profession as a level two-and-a-half potter in *Asheron's Call* is fulfilling, and that good company consists of vacuous conversations with Brad from LA about their mutual love of dressing up as Mr Spock at the weekends.

Fortunately, for the majority of us, online gaming simply involves a couple of hours a day of online fragging, or the occasional evening levelling-up session on *EverQuest*. But how do we know when we're going too far, if we're degenerating into gaming's equivalent of a pallid, anorak-wearing spod who pisses away their weekends writing down train number plates? Well here's where you find out. Just answer this simple set of questions, add up your score and you'll know if you're spending too much, too little or just the right amount of time online. PCZ

AM I SPENDING TOO LONG PLAYING ONLINE GAMES?

Q: IF YOU MET A MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITE SEX WHO YOU FANCIED, WOULD YOU...

A Charm them with a barrage of superlatives about their physical appearance, and entrance them by whisking them away for a romantic weekend in Paris? (1 point)

B Regale them with an hilarious anecdote about the last time you played *Counter-Strike*, when you accidentally blinded yourself with a flash bang? (100 points)

C Stare at the floor looking gormless, while mumbling something about computers, system RAM and *EverQuest*, before walking away and tripping up on your own shoelace? (1,000 points)

D I'm already married to my cyber-wife Ezmerelda Crapsenheart, who lives with me in Shitsenville in the land of Zabar, so I wouldn't be interested. (10,000 points)

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY FRIENDS WHO ARE NORMAL?

A Yes, we regularly head down the local and have a right ol' laff. (1 point)

B Of course. We meet regularly on chat sites to discuss team tactics at *Counter-Strike*. My best friend is called {[LL]} Plssfl_alos W3nk0ff and he's a 42nd-level mage in *Asheron's Call (one higher than me)*. (1,000 points)

Q: WHICH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING DESCRIBES YOUR APPEARANCE?

A I wash my clothes regularly, have the occasional spot and keep my hair neat. (1 point)

B I'm a 47-stone tub of lard, but as I'm no longer able to walk without the support of an industrial-sized crane, it's hard to confirm that this is still my exact weight. I look like a cross between Anne Widdecombe and the Honey Monster, only slightly less attractive. (10,000 points)

C I have the girth of a small child, have vitamin E deficient see-through skin and a clump of pube-like facial hair protruding from my chin. I have a bent spine, clawed hands, milky white streaks down my trousers and two broken legs, which I picked up when I tripped over my ADSL connection lead. (100,000 points)

Q: WHAT'S YOUR OCCUPATION?

A I work in a steady job five days a week. I live for the weekends when I try to enjoy myself with a wide variety of diversions (although I'm usually too exhausted to do anything other than sit vacantly in front of *Grandstand*), to help me forget my soul-destroying and dead-end weekday existence in which I fester in a sweaty office with a bunch of bald-headed, BO-stinking, pot-bellied sycophants who I don't actually like. (-2 points)

B I am Flintanvil Dribbletwat II (my original persona was savagely beaten to death with a severed dwarf's leg by a rabid ogre called George). I roam the land bringing justice to the oppressed and am generally a pompous twat who spouts sermons at disinterested peasants about chastity and the virtues of comradeship. (100,000 points)

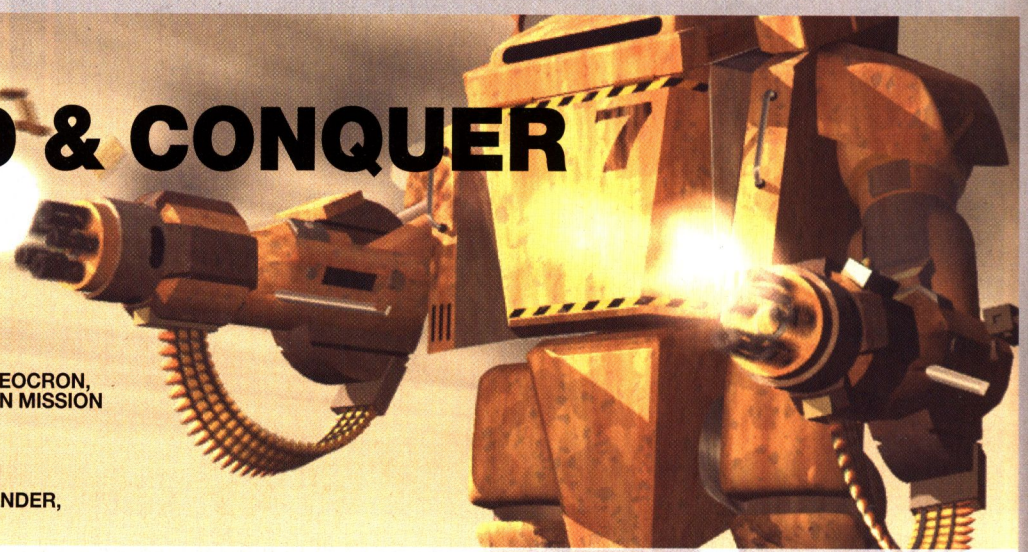
HOW DID YOU DO?

1-99 POINTS You need to relax more. Otherwise you're heading for a nervous breakdown and you'll spend the rest of your life having your genitals manipulated with a gnarled sponge by a sour-faced nurse in a mental hospital. Go on, unwind with a game of *Quake*.

100-199 POINTS You're OK, but don't go any further. Otherwise you could end up littering the outskirts of society like a used condom in the backstreets of a red light district.

200-211,000 POINTS You're a social retard. Get a grip.

COMING NEXT ISSUE...



COMMAND & CONQUER

PAST, PRESENT, *FUTURE*

We take a look at the history of the C&C Universe, and exclusively reveal where Westwood is taking the franchise next

FOR YOU

HITMAN 2, JEDI KNIGHT II, FREEDOM FORCE, NEOCRON, HIDDEN & DANGEROUS DELUXE, GHOST RECON MISSION PACK, MORROWIND, FREELANCER...

FOR YOUR PC

DUNGEON SIEGE, STAR TREK: BRIDGE COMMANDER, NEOCRON, C&C: RENEGADE...

...AND THEN SOME

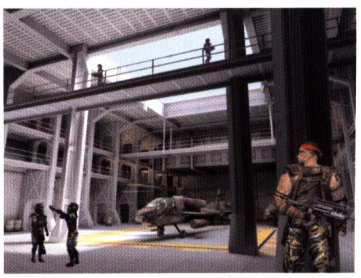
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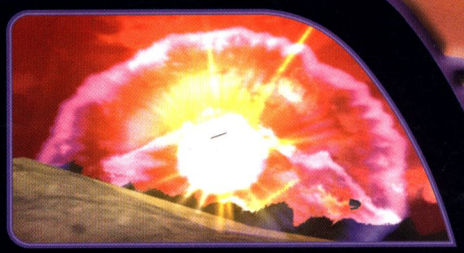
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